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# MEDITATIONS AND DISCOURSES

ON

# THE SUBLIME TRUTHS

AND

# IMPORTANT DUTIES OF CHRISTIANITY:

BEING A POSTHUMOUS WORK OF


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AUTHOR OF "THE LIVES OF THE SAINTS;" "FEASTS AND FASTS OF THE CHURCH;" &c., &c.


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# MEDITATIONS.

## MEDITATION I.

### SALVATION OUR ONLY AFFAIR.

Our salvation is the only end for which Almighty God created us, and placed us in this world. It was his only end in redeeming us. It is the only thing he has given us in charge, and this by the most severe command.

1. "One thing is necessary," says our dearest Saviour, viz., that we love and serve God, and save our souls. This was the sole and whole design of the most holy Trinity in *creating me* and all mankind. Nor could he produce anything but for himself, as it is the indefeasible right of the Creator, that every creature always depend on, and ever be referred to him, its essential last end and centre. He stood in no need of any creature, being infinitely happy in himself, and incapable of receiving any addition or accession. "Thou art my God, because thou standest not in need of my goods." It was out of his mere boundless goodness that he was pleased to create men, that he might communicate himself to them, and make them happy in himself. Thus he made them for himself. "The Lord wrought all things for himself." I lay buried in the abyss of nothing. If God stretched out his merciful arm and drew me thence—if he gave me this noble being, capable of knowing and praising him—if he bestowed on me this body, with all its wonderful organs and senses, this immortal soul, endowed with reason and all its faculties, it was only that I might know and love him, and be made partaker of his happiness and goodness. He framed the sun, moon, and other planets; the vast firmament, spangled with so many bright stars, and the heavens, with all the bodies they contain; and established the laws of their uninterrupted revolutions and various movements, for me. He created for me this earth, with all its elements, metals,

fruits, trees, and plants; and with all the innumerable variety of living creatures that fill the air, the earth, and the waters: all for this same only end, that I might thank, praise, and obey him. It was no part of his adorable design, in making and placing me here, that I should occupy myself in pleasures, riches, honours, or any other thing whatsoever which should not totally and purely belong and be referred to this his only end. Every moment, therefore, I ever spent in such empty pursuits, I ran counter to the holy designs of the blessed Trinity in my regard, and to the sole end for which I received my being in this world. With what regret, my God, do I reflect on my past unthinking folly and base perfidiousness! No more, by thy assistance, will I ever be so senseless. I will never undertake or perform any action, even in my temporal affairs, but in the view of doing your most holy will. To this alone I will labour with all my strength —I will refer all my moments—I will consecrate my thoughts, affections, words, and actions. For this I will never cease most earnestly to implore your divine grace. Teach me and strengthen me to seek and follow only your holy will in all things, and never more to swerve from my end fixed by yourself. "Make my end known to me." *Notum fac mihi, Domine, finem meum* (Ps. xxxviii.), shall be my continual prayer.

In this same only view has God preserved and still preserves me; thus every moment bestowing afresh my whole being upon me; rescuing and protecting me from innumerable accidents, misfortunes, and dangers; furnishing me with all the conveniencies, necessaries, and comforts of life, which I enjoy. How could I be so blind and insensible as hitherto, so strangely, to misapply his gifts, and abuse his bounty, to my own inexpressible misfortune! I will, to the utmost of my power, for the future, retrieve, and make all possible amends for past losses, by giving every action and moment to my last end with redoubled fervour.

2. God points out this my only end, still more remarkably, in all the great mysteries he has wrought for me, *in the order of grace:* in these he displays his infinite wisdom and power in the most astonishing manner. When I was lost in sin, and groaned under the slavery of the devil and the sentence of eternal damnation, the blessed Trinity decreed my redemption, and the eternal God the Son descended from Heaven, clothed himself with human nature, led a painful, laborious life on earth, and died a most cruel and ignominious death, to pay my ransom and reinstate me in grace, only that I might love and serve him. All the mysteries

of his whole life, his birth, his hidden life, his miracles, preaching, sufferings, death, resurrection, and ascension; his establishing his Church; his sacraments and inspirations; the exhortations of his ministers; all the graces, all the means of salvation I have ever received, had only this one end in view, that I should save my soul. If ever I deviate from it, I frustrate, in my regard, all his designs, all his sufferings and labours, and all his graces, which cost him so dear. My soul, thy salvation is a good, for which God has not spared his only Son: a good which this only Son has purchased at the price of his own blood, of his life, of himself. See how much thou hast cost a God, and hence frame an idea of the importance of this affair of thy salvation. Can any Christian be so senseless as to give up his right to God's inheritance, for a base pleasure—for a vile interest?

3. God, in creating me, has commanded me to serve him and save my soul, and that I make this my only affair. "It is written: Thou shalt adore the Lord thy God, and serve him alone."—Matt. iv. 10. "No man can serve two masters."—Matt. vi. 20. And the oracle of the Holy Ghost declares: "Fear God, and keep his commandments: for in this does every man, and the whole man, consist" (Eccles. xii. 13), *i. e.*, all else in man is nothing. All honours, riches, shining qualities, great actions, conquests of empires; all wit, policy, knowledge, and sciences, are nothing—nothing in themselves, and in reality—mere folly before God, and in truth. It is only as far as his service may be found in them, that they are to be considered. The humble labour of the poorest artisan, referred to God, is incomparably great; whereas *they* are emptiness, and generally sin. "Though a man should be accomplished and quite finished among the sons of men, if thy wisdom be not with him, he will be reckoned for nothing, O God!"—Sap. ix. 6. Though he should be the most accomplished in all natural parts, and in all acquired qualifications of mind and body; the most learned philosopher, and an oracle in all sciences; the most renowned conqueror, who fills the universe with the noise of his name; all this, the Holy Ghost says, is contemptible, is nothing. The valour of an Alexander and a Cæsar—the eloquence of a Cicero—the learning of an Aristotle or a Plato, is nothing. The poverty of a Lazarus, abandoned by all the world, is far more desirable than all the greatness, all the riches, and all the delights of the earth: a glass of cold water, given to a poor man, is preferable to the acquisition of a crown; and one simple act of the meanest virtue is preferable

to the most famous exploits of those divinities of the earth, who have filled the world with the sound of their applause. Splendid as these are in the eyes of mortals, God esteems, more than them all, one single thought of the most simple labourer employed for eternity. Did men weigh well this truth, they would envy the solitude of the poorest artisan above the highest throne on earth, and deem whatever all the world esteems (as it truly is) folly and madness.

My soul, examine thy own heart. Has the service of God been hitherto thy only end? Make it such for the future. Hast thou looked upon this as thy only affair? Esteem it so from henceforward. Have this deeply engraven on thy mind: let all other projects succeed or not succeed, it matters not. "Whatever is not God is nothing, and ought to be accounted for nothing."—Imit. Chr. b. 3, c. 31. All my actions and my whole life ought to be directed to this end.

To serve him, and save my soul, shall be my only and continued study, my only affair. It was the only end in the designs of God the Father in creating me. Behold the first lesson I learned in my catechism. It was the only end in the designs of God the Son in redeeming me: the only end of his mysteries, labours, and death. It was "for us men, and for our salvation," says the Nicene creed. It is the only end of the Holy Ghost in sanctifying me; and in all the graces he has bestowed and is ready to bestow upon me. And shall not this be my only study and aim in all things? I belong to God in *justice*, as I am all his; I belong to him in *gratitude*, as I subsist entirely by his benefits; I belong all to him, as he is *my last end;* I belong to him *for my own interest*, and as he is my happiness; I am made for him, and he alone is capable of filling my heart. I will then live and die to him alone, and to his service.

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## MEDITATION II.

### SALVATION OUR ONLY AFFAIR OF IMPORTANCE.

We judge of the importance of an affair by its excellence, and by the consequence it is of; by the difficulty of retrieving it in case of a miscarriage; by the dangers and difficulties which attend it. These considerations alone suffice to show that salvation is man's only affair of importance.

1. The more noble, the more excellent a thing is, the greater is its importance. To obtain a rich empire, or any place of great honour, what pains do not worldlings take? because they think it an affair of the utmost importance, especially if a miscarriage in it should threaten them with utter ruin. A lawsuit, on which a great estate and their all depend, what application, what study, what anxiety does it not bring? how does it engross all a man's thoughts and fill his mind, so that he is not able to give any attention to any other thing whatsoever? The importance of this draws him totally to itself, and drowns all thoughts about other things. If I have seen a man engaged in such a suit, or standing a dangerous trial for his life, I understood what it was for one to have an affair of weight on his mind. Such, and greater, ought to be my attention to the affair of my salvation. It ought wholly to possess my soul, and fill my mind and heart, so as to swallow up and drown all temporal concerns whatsoever. This will make me sovereignly happy or sovereignly miserable, and that for eternity. No other affair can make me altogether happy or miserable; all other losses leave some comfort or enjoyment, but this none at all; this includes all losses possible. O consider seriously, my soul, what it is to be saved or damned; to live for ever with the saints or suffer for ever with the devils, to reign in heaven or suffer in hell. Weigh well these great truths, and you will see that this affair is infinitely greater than all the worldly business of kings and emperors, and of all men put together; that is our only affair; that, provided this be safe, all is well: all sufferings, all other losses possible are not to be in the least regarded. But if this miscarry, all is lost. The infinite importance of this affair quite swallows up all other concerns. "For what doth it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul? or what exchange shall a man give for his soul?"—Matt. xvi. 26. "If this be lost, everything is lost," says St. Eucherius. "*Ubi salutis damnum, ibi nullum lucrum.*"—Euch. Ep. ad Valer. Yet men little think on this. "God looked down from heaven," says the royal prophet, "to see if there is a man of understanding and seeking God on earth." "All have gone astray; are altogether become unprofitable; there is not one who does good."—Ps. xiii. and lii. Could a man, from some point in the heavens, behold the whole world at once, and what all men are employed in; and did God discover to him all that passes now in their souls, he would, doubtless, see a wonderful multitude and variety of thoughts and desires; but all tending to the perishable goods of this life,

scarcely any looking farther, and referring them to eternity. He would see some eagerly pursuing honours and empire, others riches; others taken up with pastimes and pleasures: many employed in building, trading, tilling the ground, &c. All transported with passion, anger, hatred, jealousy, love, or the like, and filled with an infinity of opposite thoughts and desires, but scarcely any one thinking seriously on eternity. All, like little children, busied earnestly about baubles, but insensible to the greatest losses or concerns: infinitely to be deplored, as *their* employments lead to torments, whereas children's play-things are toys of their age. Want of knowledge excuses a child, if he rejoice to have a suit of mourning at the death of a parent, insensible of his loss; but men are inexcusable in being so insensible in regard to eternity. The Holy Ghost cries out to them: "*Usquequo parruli diligitis infantiam?*" "How long, O children, do you delight in toys?" Hear, kings and lords, doctors, prelates, generals, soldiers, merchants, and labourers—and all ye, who, busied with the cares of this life, neglect eternity—you are all deemed fools by the judgment of eternal wisdom, and your folly is the most extreme madness. My soul, beware of such blindness. Make thy salvation thy only concern in all thy undertakings. The Romans engraved in brass this as the supreme law of their republic, to take place of all other laws: "*Salus populi suprema lex esto:*" "Let the safety of the people be the sovereign law." Engrave on thy heart and on all thy actions this as thy supreme rule, to be always and solely attended to: "The salvation of thy soul is thy sovereign law." For other affairs regard only particular times or circumstances; this is the great affair of all times, actions, and places, at home and abroad, in town and in country, in solitude and in company, in church, at court, or the market.

Our salvation is of so much greater importance, because a miscarriage in it is for ever, and utterly irretrievable. Temporal losses usually may, at least in some measure, be repaired, or some amends, some comfort, still remain. If we lose a house, we build another; if a friend, we may find a second. If we lose an eye or a hand, we have one still; at least we have always some comforts or helps to supply the loss. But we have but one soul, and if this be once lost, the loss is absolute, and eternally irretrievable; for out of hell there is no redemption. If in case of disappointment we could be admitted to a second chance, the case would not be absolutely so dreadful. But a soul once lost is for ever lost. Can

I then risk this my only one, this my great all, my spiritual and immortal soul, created to the likeness of God and stamped with his image! She was made only to know, love, and enjoy God, and to be his eternal spouse.

Ah, my soul! secure thy main chance, in which a loss is absolutely irrecoverable and entire. Contemn all other affairs whatsoever; only be solicitous never to expose this to the least hazard. No care, no security, can be too great, where an eternity is depending. Bear always in mind the important advice of thy Redeemer, the true lover of souls: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his justice."—Matt. vi. 33. And the comment of St. Bernard: "Never admit the least thought prejudicial to thy salvation. I say too little; I mean the least thought, which does not concern or some way tend to thy salvation. If any occur, it is to be rejected."—De Cons. 1. 3, c. 3.

3. What, above other considerations, ought to excite my solicitude and watchfulness, is the difficulty and uncertainty of this most important affair, and my all. There is no absolute security on earth: the way is straight, the judge rigorous, the examination most strict and severe on every action, intention, and thought. I am weakness itself; my understanding is clouded; my will perverted by sin; my passions strong and many; enemies without and within, numerous, subtle, and implacable. Amidst these, my soul is surrounded with so many dangers, that my salvation must imply a chain of many continued miracles. Imagine a small boat, half rotten, leaking on every side, floating on a vast sea, full of rocks and shelves, beaten by a furious storm, in the midst of a dark night, and pursued by cruel pirates, what a miracle, or rather chain of miracles, would be necessary for that poor vessel to arrive safe in the harbour? The state of a soul in this world is still more dangerous, meeting everywhere dangers, everywhere stumbling blocks. Nor can she ever have any security; for, as the wise man says: "Who of men can know his own way?"—Prov. xx. 24. We see an Apostle, though confirmed in grace, chastising his body lest he should become a reprobate; a St. John the Baptist, though sanctified in his mother's womb, pass twenty-five years in a frightful solitude, and in the most severe penitential life; a St. Augustin, after his conversion, refusing to teach rhetoric or profane learning, lest he should forget his salvation; others burnt, racked, or hewn in pieces; legions of saints retiring into lonesome deserts, others walling themselves up in cloisters, all labouring with continual application to secure their

salvation; and can I be so slothful and negligent in this my great, my only concern, and yet live secure, as if salvation cost little, and was the least, the safest of affairs!

If I will, it is certainly in my power to save my soul, and secure my eternity, through the assistance of divine grace. God wills not the death of any sinner; "he desires all men to be saved."—2 Tim. ii. 4. He created me only to serve him, and to save myself. He sent his only Son, equal, and co-eternal with himself, to redeem me. After giving me *Him*, has not he given all other things with him? He furnishes me abundantly with all the means of salvation, and assures me of all his most powerful succours, infinitely more earnestly desiring my happiness, than I can do myself. I will then strive and contend with the greatest ardour I am capable of to ascertain this main and only affair.

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## MEDITATION III.

### ON FERVOUR IN THE SERVICE OF GOD.

The first great obstacle, by which the devil ruins the salvation of innumerable Christian souls, is lukewarmness and tepidity. For fervour is necessary to begin to serve God truly. It is necessary to persevere in serving him. It behoves me to know in what this Christian fervour consists.

1. The first step to virtue is vehemently to desire it. To desire so great a good only by halves is to undervalue it, and the sure disposition never to obtain it. Our Saviour compares the kingdom of God to a "treasure hidden in a field, which a man having found, selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field;" and again, to a pearl of great price, "which when one had found, he went his way, and sold all that he had, and bought it."—Matt. xiii. 44, 45, 46. This great treasure, this precious pearl, is the kingdom of God reigning in our souls by his grace. This is a good above all price; God is mercifully pleased to bestow it upon us, but on condition we give for it our whole selves. If we do not offer him our souls and all our affections, without any reserve or division, we cannot purchase it. It is a false maxim of the world that the kingdom of God costs little. It must cost all we have: it requires an entire sacrifice of all, at least in spirit,

Religious persons, who consecrate themselves to God in cloisters, renounce the world and all its affairs, distractions, vanities, and pleasures; the dominion of themselves and their own wills. This is not of precept to all: this they do only as a means to be able to make the interior sacrifice of all in their hearts more freely and more perfectly. But this inward sacrifice of all things in spirit is indispensably necessary, and of precept as to all, whether religious, or Christians living in the world. It is only on this condition, only by this means I can purchase the kingdom of God, by his grace in my soul during this life, and that of his glory in the world to come.

My heart cannot contain together God and the world: it is too narrow for both. God is too great to allow any rival, or to find a place in a divided heart. His first and great law is: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole mind."—Matt. xxii. 37. He has made me all for himself, and cannot, without the greatest injury, indignity, and injustice to himself, admit any partner or competitor in my affections. "No man can serve two masters" (Matt. v.), especially such as are directly contrary to one another, as God and the world essentially are. We must, then, seek this inestimable treasure of grace with the most earnest desire we are capable of—with a desire that has some proportion to so great a blessing—with a desire ready to renounce and sacrifice everything else for it—with a desire that despises and tramples upon all things which tend not to this. With the Apostle: "we must count all things to be but loss. I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but as dung, that I may gain Christ."—Phil. iii. 8. "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice (*i.e.* that seek it with a vehement desire), for they shall have their fill," says our blessed Saviour.—Matt. v. 6. And the wise man says: "The beginning of wisdom is the most true desire of discipline."—Sap. vi. 18. And he attributes to this all the spiritual wisdom of grace and virtue which God bestowed upon him. "I desired, and wisdom was given me; and I begged it, and the spirit of wisdom came unto me. And I preferred it to kingdoms and thrones; and I counted riches to be nothing in comparison of it. Nor did I compare the precious stones to it; because all gold is but a little sand, and silver will be esteemed as dirt if compared to it. I loved it above life and beauty, and desired to have it as my light; for its light is perpetual. All good things come unto me together with it, and unspeakable glory through its hands. Its treasure is infinite to men: they who have

used it have been made sharers of the friendship of God."—Sap. vii. 7, &c. He again declares: "wisdom is easily seen by those who love it, and is found by those who seek it. It directs those who desire her, to show herself first to them. He that watches to her from the early morning shall not labour in his search; for he shall find her at his door. He who shall watch for her shall be soon secure; because she goes about seeking those who are worthy of her, and she cheerfully shows herself to them in the highways, and meets them in everything."—Sap. vi. 13, &c. "I loved and sought her from my youth, and sought to take her a spouse to myself, and I was her lover. I purposed to draw her to me to rest with me, knowing that she will communicate of her good things with me."—Sap. viii. The devout Henry Suso, hearing these last words read at table in a Dominican convent, was so powerfully affected by them, that, in public, he burst out into these exclamations: "Oh! I will try to procure this happy wisdom. If I can obtain it, I am certainly the happiest of men. I will desire, I will seek, I will ask nothing else. It invites me; it is in my power to obtain it. Adieu all other thoughts and employs. I will pray and conjure it without ceasing, and with all the ardour of my soul, to visit me. I will sigh and seek it night and day." Thus he did, and thus he became an eminent servant of God. Suerius vit. de Suson.

My soul, the eternal wisdom invites thee, crying aloud on the mountains and highways, in the streets, at the entries of towns, at the doors of houses, everywhere calling men to him, saying: "O men, to you I cry out; my voice is directed to the sons of men. O, little ones, learn prudence; and O fools, understand. Listen, for I am going to speak of great things. Wisdom is better than all most precious things, and no other desirable good can be compared to it. I love those who love me: and they who watch to me in the morning shall find me. With me are riches and glory, great treasure and justice. My fruit is better than gold and jewels. I will walk in the paths of justice, seeking to enrich those who love me, and to fill their stores," &c.—Prov. viii. Call in this great good to thyself, and prepare thy heart for it with all possible application and care. Bless God, who has created thee for such an infinite blessing, and exert all thy ardour and strength, that sloth and cowardice deprive thee not of it. "It is only the hungry God has filled with good things" (Luke, i. 53); *i. e.*, those who vehemently desire and most ardently seek them.

Fervour is equally necessary for us to our perseverance and

progress in the service of God. This is the greatest mark of the Holy Ghost's reigning in a soul, if she earnestly strive to advance in perfection: it is a sign that a man has already found the mine, when he is earnest to dig farther and farther. "No one is virtuous," says St. Bernard, Ep. 254, ad Garin, "who does not perpetually strive and desire to be more virtuous. He gives a proof of greater perfection, by how much the more earnestly he labours to attain higher." And as the same Saint says, Serm. 2. de 1 Andr., "There is no more certain testimony of the presence of the Holy Ghost than a great desire of higher grace."

Out of this motive St. Paul always laboured in fear, if by any means he could obtain his crown. "*Si quomodo comprehendam.*" Phil. iii. 13. This is the strict command of God: "Be faithful unto death."—Apoc. xi. 10. Fear not advancing in justice until death. "Let him, who is just, be justified yet: and he who is holy be sanctified yet more." This is the law of our engagements to God. This is also the proper effect of grace, which is sure to abandon those who do not improve it. Hence, St. Augustin says, "If thou standest still thou art a lost man." "*Si stetisti periisti.*" Serm. 15. verb. ap. And again: "God hates him who would stand still, and who falls back."—L. de Cant. novo, c. 1. Not to go on is to go back. "No man putting his hand to the plough, and looking behind him, is fit for the kingdom of God," says Christ, Luke, xix. 11. Whence St. Bernard cries out: "O monk, will thou not go forward? then thou wouldst go back, or thou wouldst stand, which cannot be; for nothing can stand in the same state in this world."—Ep. 353. And St. Gregory the Great: "It is not possible to stand in one place: he falls to the lowest who strives not continually to the highest."—Pastor., p. 3, admon. 53. For, on one side, grace forsakes him; on the other, his passions draw him headlong. For we are like to a man, says Cassian, who is rowing against a rapid stream; the moment he ceases to row, he is driven back by the strength of the current. So are we by the torrent of our passions, if we in the least let fall our hands.

2. St. Basil thus defines a fervent soul: "He is fervent in spirit who ever does the will of God with an ardent desire, an insatiable eagerness, and an unwearied attention and diligence."—Resp. brev. 259. He is one, who, burning with the holy fire of divine love, does not go, but flies to all that regards the service of God, and this with an ardour, zeal, and fidelity which never slacken; one who, penetrated in the bottom of his soul with the most profound

sentiments which a creature can conceive for its God, is always occupied in adoring, praising, and blessing him, and finds no other pleasure on earth than in all things to do his will, and give himself anew to him, and who is desirous of crosses and suffering for his sake. Fervour consists not so much in what is done, as in doing everything with the greatest sentiments for God, *with a great heart and willing cheerful soul.* Farthings, offered to God with a heart full of affection, are more agreeable to him than the richest presents made with a tepid heart. Fervour, then, implies, 1st, A sincere intention and an earnest desire to please God. 2ndly, An entire application, with all possible attention to every duty. 3rdly, An extreme gratitude in all duties. 4thly, Courage and joy under all difficulties, breaking through all obstacles. 5thly, To enter into the spirit and perfect sentiments of every virtue. 6thly, To seize all occasions and opportunities of virtue. 7thly, Constancy and perseverance to the end. What eagerness in those who are near kings? With what zeal do the angels fly to do God's will? With what swiftness do the stars move to perform it? With what exactness does nature observe his laws? An image of the swiftness and exactness with which we ought to run in all the ways of the Lord.

My soul, convert thyself to God with fervour. "If thou beginnest, begin perfectly," as St. Bernard says. It would be a deceitful stratagem of the devil to undertake too much at first. A child cannot bear what a man could. Begin with prudence and advice, but with great ardour and fervency of soul, and with great dispositions. Be careful always to preserve and increase this fervour of thy conversation, continually to awaken and stir it up afresh. Remind thyself often of thy end and obligations, imitating St. Bernard, who often said to himself for this purpose: "Bernard, Bernard, why camest thou hither?" or St. Arsenius, who always repeated: "Arsenius, why didst thou forsake the world and come into this desert?" 2ndly, Say often to thyself, that thou wilt now begin to do penance and serve God: "I have said, it is now I begin in earnest."—Ps. lxxvi. 7. For, in the paths of virtue, "when a man shall have finished, it is then he still begins."—Eccl. xvii. 6. 3rdly, Sometimes say: "A great way still remains for thee."—3 Kings, xix. 7. An eternity is to be provided for: the time for this is very short and uncertain. 4thly, With St. Paul, forget the past, wholly occupied with the thoughts of what is before thee, and how to employ all that well. "I do not think I have yet attained anything," says the Apostle (Phil.

iii. 13); "but one thing I do: forgetting the things that are behind, and stretching forth myself to those that are before." Thus only look forwards, my soul. But, 5thly, remember thou art to redouble thy pace, because thou hast already lost much time, and the end of thy course draws near; and "so much the more, as you shall see the day of the Lord approach nigher you." —Heb. x. 35. I must trade till he comes with my wages in his hands. "*Negotiamini dum venio.*"—Luke, xix. 13.

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## MEDITATION IV.

### ON TEPIDITY IN THE SERVICE OF GOD.

WHAT is this tepidity? It generally is a state of hidden mortal sin. It exposes to a certain and most dangerous fall.

1. The just fall into venial sins by surprise, and into small infidelities of frailty; but they soon discover and detest them, and speedily, by penance for them, recover whatever prejudice or diminution their fervour and charity may have suffered. But those are called lukewarm who wilfully fall into venial sins, and habitually contemn them, or at least who are afraid of embracing perfect virtue. They frequent the sacraments; they pray, but all with indifference. They indeed are afraid of mortal sin, and would not knowingly consent to one for the world, and propose by their lives to save their souls, and to avoid the broad way; but then they are afraid also of being bigots, or of going too far in piety, they dare not open their hearts entirely to it, and fear it should get full possession of their souls. Their common language is, that ordinary virtue is enough for them; they are content, if they can be saved with the lowest degree, or even through purgatory, and do not aim at the merits of the saints, or to walk in the sublime paths of perfection, as they call them. Under these pretexts, they are afraid to go beyond obligation, and examine always how far it may be stretched. Thus they bargain, as it were, with God in every duty, how far they are obliged to go under the guilt of mortal sin. Now, this disposition is extremely displeasing to Almighty God. Did he, in redeeming them, and in the innumerable mercies which he so bountifully showers down upon them, follow such a rule, or go no farther than he was obliged? How must he resent such a base

and ungrateful return? Gerson illustrates the case by this comparison: If a nobleman amongst many sons had one, who would obstinately sit always idle at home, caring for nothing, provided he could live in a sordid manner, saying, "he was content to lead any kind of mean life," and so would never undertake or learn anything suitable to his birth or capacity, though continually admonished and pressed to it by his father, is it not evident that such a disobedient, slothful son could expect no favours from his father?—Myst. Theol. consid., t. 3, c. 405. Another common comparison is that of a servant, who, though unwilling to transgress his master's orders in matters of weight, should be ever disputing how far his duty carried him in them, and should make it even his diversion to violate his commands in smaller things on every occasion. Certainly such a behaviour would be more insupportable than that of a servant who should sometimes offend in points of moment. Thus, the lukewarm Christian is often more odious to God than the open sinner. Hear what our Saviour said to the lukewarm bishop of Laodicea, Apoc. iii. 15, 16: "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot. I would thou wert cold or hot; but because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth." Had he been quite cold in the service of God, Christ would not have so much abhorred him. As he was lukewarm, our merciful Lord expresses how hateful that state was to him, by saying his stomach even loathed him, and that he must vomit him up, and cast him off.

2. Lukewarmness in any considerable degree must generally be accompanied with many hidden mortal sins. The soul flatters herself she is in a state of grace, but alas! before God she has already lost that happiness, and yet her misery is hidden from her eyes. First, perhaps, she has been in an habitual disposition of never labouring to avoid any venial sin. This is in itself always a mortal sin, because it implies a grievous contempt of God, and is an immediate occasion of mortal sin. Secondly, the tepid soul is ever studying to enlarge the narrow way as much as may be, and often ventures so far as the boundaries of mortal sin, boundaries which are often uncertain, and in which self-love easily blinds and deceives the negligent Christian. Thus, whilst he allows himself several liberties and freedoms in his actions, in his words, in his thoughts, he often offends mortally by detractions, rash judgments, &c., in what he persuades himself is no more than venial. He also often deceives himself in the interpre-

tation of the law, and, blinded by passion, judges of it in a false light, straining all the precepts of the Church, and even of the law of nature, to his own desires; for example, magnifying every slight indisposition into a pretence for a dispensation from fasting; or taking too large allowances for collation, calling indecent freedoms innocent diversion, and the like, daily indulging in the passions of jealousy, hatred, revenge, sensuality, &c., in which many secret motions cannot but be observed by a watchful eye, and a timorous conscience; whereas, in the lukewarm Christian, tepidity and negligence have, by weakening the lights of faith, and fortifying the passions, spread such clouds over the soul, that she cannot judge truly of the law, nor of what passes in her own thoughts, but will ever be apt to deceive herself. Above all, such persons are most easily deceived into sins of omission, and into a destruction of the queen of all virtues—charity. Is it not much to be feared, that the love of God above all things reigns no longer in a life all made up of softness, sloth, sensuality, and self-love, especially as no mark nor character of that divine love appears in it? What appearance that a soul loves God above all things (which is the essence of this divine virtue), that shows no disposition but that of a mercenary, the fear of hell, seeking nothing more than to escape eternal punishment? It is a mark of charity to be timorous, to exaggerate dangers and evils, to labour for salvation in fear and trembling. "*Sed aggravat, sed exaggerat universa,*" says St. Bernard. This path has been that of all the just of all ages. How contrary is that of the tepid? They throw themselves on the left side, as far as they dare, compatibly with the fear of hell, and are afraid of the safe or of the right path. Another mark of charity is, that it is always active, always lively. Love is indefatigable; it never ceases. What sign of this divine fire in a heart indolent and slothful to everything that concerns the service of God? Ah, tepid soul! what reason have we to fear, that the threat of our Redeemer belongs to thee: "Thou hast the name of being alive, and thou art dead" (Apoc. ii. 1); or that other: "Thou sayest, I am rich, and made wealthy, and have need of nothing; thou knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

3. Tepidity leads souls still farther into the most fatal ruin. This conscience is clear from experience; reason also shows it: for by tepidity the source of graces is drained, and on the other side passions are strengthened. Without the succours of divine grace, it is impossible for a soul to persevere in justice. As the

hand of the Creator must always preserve the being it has once given us, or, otherwise, it would every instant fall into its original nothing; so that the spiritual life of the soul must be always maintained by the grace of him who gave it. It is preserved only by this continual dependence on its succours. In the just, the fidelity to grace continually draws down other graces: but the negligence and infidelities of the lukewarm drain up that source; as a just punishment, God withdraws them. Nothing can be more just than this conduct. Tepid souls, enter into judgment with God. You neglect to give him marks of your fidelity; you dispute everything with him, and you are upon your guard, lest you should give him too much. You count with your God, as I may say, and watch to set his love bounds in your heart; and is it not reasonable, that he should prescribe bounds to his bounty to you, and repay your indifference for him by a return of indifference for you, and by refusing the liberal dispensation of his more powerful graces, which you do not prepare yourselves to receive, but make yourselves unworthy of? On the other hand, the passions are strengthened. Tepidity is an habitual indulgence of them; they cannot be conquered but by being openly resisted. Allowing them certain bounds, gratifying them to a certain point, fortifies and stirs them up, as throwing a small handful of food to a devouring lion does not satisfy his hunger, but rouses him and makes him more furious. They grow too violent to be restrained. At the same time, the path of sin becomes more open and easy; the heart has already made its approaches very near it, even to its very borders, and has but one small step more to take, and a step almost insensible; nay, it often makes it without perceiving it is gone so far. And what makes the fall of a tepid soul quite desperate is, that she herself is ignorant of it; her misery is hidden from her own eyes; like Jerusalem, she knows not the judgments that are hanging over her head. How will she be surprised at the approach of death, when she will too late see her whole past life to be a chaos, which she cannot unravel, and in which she can see nothing clear; but that it was all filled with a love of the world, indolence in prayer and every virtue, duties satisfied by halves, secret antipathies, fondnesses, complaisances, and a thousand defects never discovered, and consequently never bewailed; she will then see, that she has been guilty of an uninterrupted ingratitude against God, and a continued infidelity to his inspirations. She will remember, that the unprofitable servant who hid his talent was

condemned, and will tremble to see that all her life, or the greater part of it, has been unprofitable; made up of self-love, sensual affections, pleasures, and diversions. She will see the negligence with which she performed spiritual duties, and justly fear, that sacraments so received were sacrileges, and prayer so performed abomination before God. She will see, that her tepid life not only robbed God of *her* own heart, but that her evil example, and vain conversations, treacherously defrauded him of the affections and service of others.

A tepid soul deprives herself of all the sweets of virtue, especially of that peace of conscience and unction of the Holy Ghost, which make the yoke of Christ light and pleasant to the fervent. She must be a stranger to the peace of conscience, whose whole life appears even to herself to have been spent in a thousand daily transgressions. She has no share in the unction of the Holy Ghost, which spreads a sweetness over the most austere practices of virtue, and fills zealous souls with consolation and joy. Nor has she anything of that relish and pleasure, which true love and fervour find in the exercises of piety. She bears the whole yoke of the law, without any ease or comfort under it, because she would only carry it by halves. Hence, St. Bernard thus addresses himself to tepid souls: "All of you know true virtue, and its paths; but the will of all is not the same in them. Some run, or rather fly, in everything: to these, watchings are short, abstinence sweet, and labour desirable. But others walk not so: they are only dragged, nay, are scarcely dragged or compelled by the fear of hell, and march with a dry heart, and with reluctancy. There are many such, who eat the same bread with us, sleep with us, pray with us, work with us, sharers with us in all our tribulations, but not in our comforts; truly miserable and unhappy. These, at length, either sink under the burden, and fall, or live on in a kind of hell on earth, never aspiring at the light of God's mercies, nor to that liberty of spirit, which alone makes the yoke sweet and the burden light."

Tepid souls, by their habitual indolence, are quite indisposed to be moved by divine grace. The Holy Ghost is all fire, all action, all vigour. But tepidity plunges a soul into a state of languor, which enervates her, and takes away all her strength, all her life, and makes her even incapable of any good, or of being inspired with courage and vigour, without which there can be no virtue. Thus she is often more indisposed to receive any advantage from grace than habitual sinners. The exterior means of grace are also

unprofitable to her. The sacraments are dangerous in her state, and, tepidly received, at best amuse her languor; but do not heal her. Prayer, the great channel of graces, is little or no resource, in the slothful manner in which she has recourse to it. Exhortations, pious books, alarming calls of God awake her not, because she flatters herself that all goes well with her. Is not, then, her state in a manner desperate? Cassian, that great master of a spiritual life, writes thus of it, Collat. iv. c. 19: "We have often seen souls converted to perfection from a state of coldness, that is, from among worldlings and heathens, but have never seen any from amongst tepid Christians, who are also so detestable to God, that he commands his preachers, by his Prophet, not to exhort them in vain, but abandon them as a fruitless, barren ground, and sow the divine word on new hearts among heathens and sinners. 'Plough up the new land, and do not sow on this ground overgrown with thorns.'"—Jer. iv. 3. My soul, tremble at thy past lukewarm life; retrieve what thou hast lost, by redoubling thy fervour from this moment.

## MEDITATION V.

### ON THE VIOLATION OF THE PRECEPT OF TENDING TO PERFECTION: — THAT PERFECTION IS COMMANDED TO ALL.

To aim at perfection in virtue is a precept to all persons. Perfection is compatible with all states and professions. It may be observed in the smallest actions.

1. The general pretext of tepid souls is, that they do not, or in their station in the world cannot, aim at perfection. This is a great illusion of our spiritual enemy, and a gross mistake. Almighty God, in commanding all men to serve him, has commanded that all serve him perfectly, or by an heroic or eminent virtue. Lame or imperfect services can never be agreeable to God; they can only undervalue his infinite majesty, and depreciate the eternal kingdom, which is the recompense he has destined to his faithful servants. When the Jews offered the lame, the weak, or sick beasts among their cattle in the old law, he disdained to accept such sacrifices from their hands, and bade them present such to their temporal prince, and see if he would receive them.—Mal. i. 8. The Babylonian king would have

none to wait upon him but such as in whom there was no spot. And certainly God will rank none amongst his servants, who do not study to appear before him spotless and perfect. Imperfections, or small faults of frailty, without which we cannot live on earth, unless by an extraordinary privilege of grace (such as was granted to the Blessed Virgin), and which are speedily blotted out in the just by compunction and sincere repentance, do not destroy this perfection, as they are not faults of adhesion but of surprise, and are immediately repaired again. But it is not so of habitual tepidity, or a deliberate resolution of not watching against venial sin, or not giving a man's self to God entirely with his whole heart and with all his strength, which is the first and greatest of God's commandments. It is true, indeed, that all the means of perfection are not of precept to all; such as those we call evangelical counsels, which are great helps to the more easily attaining perfect virtue; but it is not in that perfection consists. These the religious embrace, by their perpetual enclosure, renouncing the world, and consecrating themselves to God by the three solemn vows of poverty, obedience, and chastity; and by the observance of a rule consisting of various exercises of virtues. On account of such means of perfection, we call one state more perfect than another, either because it furnishes more easy and more powerful means of perfection, or affords occasions of more heroic acts of virtue. Thus, St. Thomas observes, that the state of bishops is the most perfect of all states, as it furnishes the means of practising the greatest virtues in co-operating with Christ in his ministry in the conversion of souls: yet SS. Augustin and Chrysostom think few are saved in that holy character, but that more perish in it, because it is attended with great dangers and high obligations. Amongst religious orders those are esteemed most perfect, which furnish the greatest means of perfection. But it is not the habit that makes the monk, nor the state of life that makes the saint: many in the most perfect states will be cast forth at the last day, and others from the east and from the west will be called in, and seated with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God. The reason is, because perfection consists only in the perfect love of God. He is the greatest saint, who loves God most perfectly, and labours to do his will in all things with the greatest fervour. This is that perfection, which is commanded not only to priests and religious, but to all men. But it is to be attained by different means, according as particular states and obligations differ. The tepid,

therefore, who are only for a limited virtue—for a certain degree of virtue—violate the precept by which all men are bound to aim at continually advancing in the love of God, and in serving him with all their strength. Christ said not to the Apostles only, but to all his followers: "Be ye perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."—Matt. v. 48. And St. Paul uses the word *saint* for a Christian, because every Christian is bound to be a saint. "To all the saints at Ephesus." "To all the saints at Philippi." "To all the saints at Colosse," &c. None but saints can enter heaven: "nothing defiled can enter there." As, then, we desire to reign in heaven, we must all aim to be saints, all strive to be perfect. Yes, my soul, God says to thee, as he did to Abraham: "Walk before me, and be perfect."

2. Many are affrighted at the very name of perfection, and imagine it breathes nothing but tears and excessive austerities; or that it consists in raptures and lofty contemplations, of which they are incapable. Several think it is incompatible with their state of life, and the care of worldly affairs. This is all a mistake. It neither consists in nor requires extraordinary rigours, nor high contemplations; it requires neither learning, nor parts, nor a great genius; it consists in a heart capable of loving God. This all men have; the poor and the simple have often less obstacles than the rich or the learned. Nor is perfection inconsistent with worldly states and callings; on the contrary, it perfects them all; for it is the perfect Christian that makes the best prince, the best courtier, the best citizen, the best tradesman, the best master, and the best servant. God invites all to perfection—he enjoins it to all men. It must, then, consist in something of which all are capable, and which is easy and open to all, to the great, the small, the learned, and the unlearned; for he declares, "The precept which I command thee is not above thee, nor placed far from thee, nor situate in heaven, nor beyond the sea; but this my command is near thee very much, in thy own mouth, and in thy heart to do it."—Deut. xxx. 11, 14. It is entirely so; for perfection consists, first, in the performing of the great duties of religion with the most fervent dispositions, as prayer, frequenting the sacraments, &c. Secondly, in performing our ordinary actions and every part of our respective professions in the most perfect manner, and out of the purest and most perfect motive of doing by them the will of God. For what is perfect virtue, but the doing the will of God? It is his most holy will that is the rule of all virtue. The merit of actions must be equal, if his will be equally found

in them; and those are most perfect that are most conformable to it. Now, it is evidently the holy will of God, that every man acquit himself in the best manner of all the duties of his state in the world. All lawful states are good and necessary for the conservation and government of the world. God is the author of them all; and, as he is the all-wise and holy governor of this world, which he created, he would have all these professions subsist and carried on well in it. Therefore, a master employed in looking after the affairs of his family, a nobleman in managing his estate, a husbandman in his tillage, a servant in his master's business, does the will of God. This is so true, that were any man to neglect the affairs of his province, though for the purpose of praying, or visiting hospitals, he would sin before God. "If any man has not care of his own, principally his domestics, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel," by transgressing one of the first duties of religion. The reason is, that whatever holy action we do, we please not God, unless we do what he requires of us; no more, says St. Francis of Sales (Maxims), than a painter drawing an eagle pleases him that desires the picture of a bee. For it can never be agreeable to God, if we give him one thing when he requires another. Hence, our divine Redeemer, coming to convert men to the service of his heavenly Father, did not displace them, or make them change their lawful conditions. And St. Paul bids those who, when called to the faith, were free, to remain free, and those that were slaves to remain content, and serve God in that condition. He only exhorts every one to "walk worthy the vocation in which he was called." Thus, true virtue is most consistent with all lawful states; it requires little more than the same actions; only it adds to them exactness and constancy, and it ennobles them by the supernatural motive of the love of God, and the pure view of doing his will. The same we may say of all the necessities of nature, as eating, sleeping, &c., all of which virtue sanctifies by performing them for the holy will of God.

This truth may be also demonstrated by many other principles; for it is evident that virtue ought to be habitual to us, and the practice of it continual. We must be holy, not by fits, but by habit, both at home and abroad, in all places and at all times. Consequently, our perfection cannot consist in great and extraordinary actions, which must, of course be rare, as occasions of them seldom occur. Our life is made up of ordinary actions. There are many great saints before God, who never did anything extraordi-

nary for him, and their sanctity is more secure because hidden from the eyes of the world, and consisting in what is common, and what others do equally with them, but not in the same spirit. They are saints, not by works which appear before men, but by the interior virtue of their heart. This stamps a value on all they do. By this they perfectly seek the will of God in all the common actions of life, knowing it is only his holy will that gives every virtue its value; that without it the greatest actions are nothing, and with it the meanest become highly meritorious. We read of nothing extraordinary in the life of the queen of saints, the Blessed Virgin Mary. Our Saviour himself, who came to be our model of perfection, who always did what was most pleasing to his Father, and, as the Jews said of him, did all things well and the best, led a hidden life for thirty years, in which he did nothing great or wonderful. The infinite perfection of his divine actions consisted in this, that whether he ate or slept, worked with his supposed father, or helped his poor mother, or whatever else he did, his motive was always to fulfil the will of his heavenly Father. Thus, he gave us a pattern of our perfection in all our respective stations and private lives. As St. Francis of Sales remarks, "Those, then, are to be blamed, who, engaged in any vocation, desire the opportunities of others, neglecting their own, and consuming themselves and their time in unprofitable wishes." —Introduct., c. 2, p. 2. My soul, do thou, on the contrary, bless God, and be filled with joy, that he has put the means of thy sanctification so easy, so near to thee, in thy own breast. I only have to do, in a true and perfect spirit, what I otherwise do every day, to be a great saint. I will then say with the spouse in the Canticles: "I have reserved all my fruits for you" (Cant. viii. 13); doing all the actions of my life, small as well as great, for your love, my God!

3. God has annexed his greatest graces and promises to the smallest actions performed with fidelity and fervour. One single heroic sacrifice in Abraham obtained for him the highest recompense. One small obedience in Saul would have established his kingdom for ever. The wise man finds a great commendation of the valiant woman in this, that she was industrious in handling her distaff. It is thus, that by small things a soul attracts the favour of her heavenly spouse. Indeed, what are the greatest actions to God? They can be no accession to his glory, or to the bliss which he possesses in himself, and which is independent on all creatures; nor does he stand in need of any external glory from

them. He is infinitely above the greatest homage we can pay him. If he accept our little services, it is from his goodness. He regards in them the affection, not the action; the heart, not the hand. An heroic fidelity in doing all our actions for God, with exactness and fervour, is the greatest sacrifice of ourselves, and the most honourable to God of all that we can offer him. It is a continual crucifixion and sacrifice of self-love, and of all our passions. It is to make God truly the Lord of our whole lives; we then give to him not certain works set apart for him—not some passing interrupted actions, intermingled with many others of self-love and the world; but offer to him a continual sacrifice of our whole selves, with all our affections, state, employments, thoughts, words, and works, even every breath we draw. We are all his, for "we are his workmanship in Christ Jesus." Eph. xi. 3. We are all his, being bought by him at a great price, the blood of the immaculate Lamb. "You are not your own, therefore," says St. Paul, "*Non estis vestri.*" Hence the same Apostle says: "None of us lives to himself," "*Nemo nostrum sibi vivit.*"—Rom. xiv. 7. Observe how general his words are: No one, neither king, nor statesman, nor lawyer, nor labourer, nor married man; and no moment of our lives, neither sleeping, nor waking, nor working, nor playing, nor eating, nor conversing. We must be "pleasing to God through all things; fructifying in every good work." Why? because "we are all the Lord's." "*Domini sumus.*"—Rom. xiv. Hence he so frequently exhorts all states: "Let your conversation be worthy of the gospel." Phil. i. 27.

Remember, then, my soul, always to walk worthy of God, "*Ut ambuletis digné Deo.*" Living and breathing only to him, as the blessed in heaven live only to him. I will never use my heart, my hands, my eyes, my words, or thoughts to gratify my cupidity; but only for the service of my heavenly spouse.

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## MEDITATION VI.

### ON THE MANNER OF PERFORMING WELL OUR ORDINARY ACTIONS.

To perform our ordinary actions well, they must be done: 1. With a good intention; 2. With fervour; 3. With regularity and exactness.

1. It is not the doing of good actions, but the doing of them well, that will make them agreeable to God. "They who shall do just things, in a just manner, shall be justified."—Sap. vi. 11. The difference between the saint, the tepid Christian, and the sinner, consists not always in the actions; but in the manner of performing them, in the intention and fervency with which they are done. This makes the same work perfect, imperfect, or sinful. "The light of thy body is the eye," says Christ. "If thy eye be single, thy whole body shall be lightsome, but if thy eye be evil, thy whole body shall be darkness."—Mat. vi. 22, 23. He calls the intention the light and the eye of the soul, because by it we direct our actions to God, or to other ends, and our actions derive their value from the intention. If a man give alms out of vanity, the action is sinful; if out of mere natural compassion, it is a moral action, but not meritorious in the eye of heaven; if out of the love of God, and to do *his* will, it is then meritorious and an action of charity. In the same manner, our actions, to serve the necessities of nature, as eating, sleeping, moderate recreation, and the employments of our state of life, are made by the intention *bad*, if in them we seek ourselves through avarice, sloth, or sensuality, or even if we neglect to refer them to God; or *good*, if we do them with the view of God's will, and for his love. For it is his will that we maintain our being and strength for his service, and use moderately certain lawful comforts of life, and necessary recreation, to recruit our strength, and go on with greater fervour and cheerfulness in the labours of virtue. As a traveller on the road stops sometimes to repose and refresh himself, and does not by that loiter or lose his time, providing he rest not too frequently nor too long, and always remembers he is but refreshing himself the better to continue his journey. Sloth and passions are both the motive and the effect of too great indulgence of nature, of superfluity and delicacy in the table, or of spending too much time in diversions, or of eagerness and attachment to them. On this account, those persons cannot but be guilty, who employ a considerable part of their time in amusements and diversions. But moderate relaxation is sanctified by a good intention, as are all the employments of every good state of life: for, it is the will of God that the gentleman look after his family and estate, the tradesman after his business, &c. Nay, Almighty God, by placing them in that station, allotted them that employment as their proper exercise. When he placed Adam in the garden of Eden, he commanded him to prune and keep it. With what care, then, ought not I to watch over my

heart, and form this good intention in all my actions? This is the great art of arts, which makes every moment, every action of my life, a seed of an immortal crown; this is the true philosopher's stone, which turns even dirt into gold, and which makes my whole life a perfect uninterrupted sacrifice to God. "*Et glebae illius aurum.*"—Job, xxviii. 6. But it is a gross mistake, that a speculative offering in mere words is sufficient for this, or that some sign, without reflection, should have this effect. The intention must really move the heart, and be the true cause of the action. It must be carefully and seriously made in the morning, by offering all the actions of the day to God; nor will this alone suffice. Interrupted by various distractions, it cannot really influence all the works and thoughts of the whole day. It must be renewed frequently and attentively at different times of the day, and particularly at the beginning of every chief action. As the archer levels his eye to hinder the dissipation of his sight, and keep the line of its direction straight, so must we shut our hearts to all sinister respects, and place our whole view and attention on God, and the accomplishment of his will. The primitive Christians did this, by making the sign of the cross on their foreheads, before and after every action; before rising from a seat, or sitting down, lighting a fire or a candle, or extinguishing it, going out of doors or coming in. This Tertullian witnesses; De Coron. Mil. We may do it by privately making that holy sign on our breast, seriously offering our heart and action to the honour of the adorable Trinity, through the merits of Christ's passion; or, at least, by saying in our hearts, most frequently: "Purely for thy holy honour and love, O God." Or, "For thee purely, I make this visit, eat, suffer, labour, &c." Or, addressing ourselves to our Saviour, thus: "I do this in union with thy divine intention in actions on earth; to the honour of thy heavenly Father I do this; may the fervour of thine supply the imperfection of mine." Or, sometimes thinking on the fervour and purity of the intention with which the blessed Virgin swept the house, or did other like actions, unite our spirit for the same end; or with that with which the angels and other blessed spirits incessantly praise the Lord.

2. This intention, to be perfect, must be pure, *i. e.*, without any mixture of seeking ourselves. But how rare is this perfect purity of intention! Many went to see Jesus, not for himself alone, but also to see Lazarus.

It must also be fervent. Our Saviour called it "his food to do

the will of his Father." How solicitous and ardent are courtiers to anticipate the least hints of their king's commands? St. Dorotheus excited himself to continual fervour, by remembering how, in the study of profane eloquence in the world, he thought every hour too short, forgot the necessities of his body, and could not eat without having a book open before him, to read at the same time. "How much greater ardour," said he, "ought I to bring, in labouring for virtue and heaven?"—Doctr. 10. bill. part. 7. 4. Had we a true idea of heaven, or of the majesty of God, our fervour would be continual and without bounds. It is fervour which draws down God's graces. "Cursed is he that does the work of God negligently." An ancient abbot, seeing a monk labour slothfully, asked him for whom he worked? "For God's honour," answered he. "Are you not, then, ashamed," said the abbot, "to do this more slothfully for God than you would do it for me?" Our Judge will reproach us for such sloth in the service of God, as he did the Bishop of Sardis: "I find not thy works full before my God."—Apoc. iii. 2. The perfection and recompense of our actions depend entirely on the spirit and fervour of our soul with which they are done. According to this, actions produce their fruit, some a hundred fold, some sixty, some thirty—Matt. xiii. 8. "Thus all the glory of a soul is from her inward disposition."—Ps. xliv. 14. Nor does God consider how much, but from how ardent an affection she gives. "*Non quantum, sed ex quanto.*"—Cypr. de Opere et Eleem. He valued more the widow's two mites than the large alms of all the rest. "It is thy intention and fervour that give the name or stamp of value to thy actions," says S. Ambrose, L. 1. Offic. c. 30. "From how great ardour it proceeds, just so much is it valued at. See how just is thy Judge: he first asks thy own soul, how she values her work." Nay, he equally rewards the will, though the work do not follow. "The will is acceptable, according to what it has," says the Apostle. As much as the will increases, so much is the merit enhanced. God counted to Abraham the sacrifice of his son as actually done, though he had only executed it in his intention. "Because thou hast done this thing, and hast not spared thy son," &c. A devout preacher, reaping no fruit by his labours amongst souls, said: "Not the less upon this account, O Lord, wilt thou repay my labours."—"*Non minus solves, Domine, non minus solves.*"

My soul, what ought to be thy care always to increase this fervour in every action! For this end, do every work as if it

were to be the last of thy life, or as if it were the only sacrifice of thyself thou couldst ever make to God. This is the advice of St. Thomas of Aquin.—Opusc. 62, t. 17: "We ought to do every action in union with all the fervour of Christ's infinite actions to supply our weakness, and all the fervour of the saints in heaven and on earth, and out of all possible earnestness, as if all our salvation, all the praise of God, and good of souls depended on it, as if the only action we had to do was to glorify God. Take care, in doing any action, not to be eager to go to the next. This would impair thy earnestness in thy present employ. Do what thou art about well, and with thy utmost diligence; then calmly give thy attention to the following." Let thy fervour be always sedate and calm, without hurry or anxiety, yet never let it flag. The continual practice of placing thyself in the presence of God, by frequent aspirations, will be the greatest help to this. Love will give new wings to every work, as it does to the angels in executing God's will.

3. *Regularity* is a condition necessary to a virtuous life. It is itself a virtue, and adds a value to every action. God is the God of order; he shows how agreeable it is to him, by the wonderful and beautiful order which shines in the heavens and their movements, and in all his other works. Besides, regularity is necessary to fix inconstancy and fickleness. Fervour does not always remain equal. Regularity prevents its slackening, and keeps us from neglecting any of our exercises of piety. One of the greatest advantages in a religious is the perfect regularity which chalks out the will of God in every action and circumstance. Even in this world, it is impossible for any one to serve God, who does not reduce this life to some degree of rule, and who has not fixed times for prayer and other general duties. God can never be served in a life of confusion. Disorder is from the devil. Holy Writ describes hell as a place where no order dwells. The saints all led regular lives, even in courts, as King David, St. Lewis, King Alfred, &c. Exactness is also requisite in our actions to perform all of them in their due time, place, and manner. A fidelity in giving to each action all its circumstances is extremely pleasing to God; and a failure in any one must always be an imperfection, and lessen its effects. This exactness, on our side, moves Almighty God abundantly to repay our fidelity with his extraordinary graces and favours. "Thou wilt be holy with the holy, and elect with the elect, and thou wilt be perverse with the perverse."

Thus, my soul, regulate all thy actions; consider them as the will of God, perform them in a true spirit of religion, purely with a view to God, and for his love, with fervour, order, and precision, studying to be "perfect, and failing in nothing,"—Ja. i. 4,—that, when the Lord comes, thou be found a faithful servant. According to the advice of the wise man,—Eccl. xxxiii.—"Excel," *i. e.*, aim at what is heroical in all thy works. Never desire impossible circumstances, nor other states of life. God, by placing thee in thy particular station, has marked out thy exercises and the path of perfection, in which thou art to sanctify thyself. Men seek to confound the paths of virtue, and to be what they are not, because they would follow virtue by caprice, inclination, and whim. They mistake a restlessness of mind for zeal. Fall not into that stratagem of the enemy of thy salvation, "and lift not thy eyes to riches thou canst not obtain."—Prov. xxiii. 5. Apply thyself with ardour to the virtues suitable to thy state, and to perform all its duties and functions as the work which God has allotted to thee. It is the perfection of thy station, not that of a bishop, a monk, or a prince, which he expects at thy hands. Never look on any action of thy life as too small to be offered to God, or not worth thy utmost attention. He is great and rich, but he knows that thou art little and poor. This is what thou hast in thy hands to give him; it is all thou art worth for the present. Give him this, then, with a great heart, *corde magno et animo volenti*, and so disposed, that if thou hadst anything greater to offer, thou wouldst be most ready to do it. He will look upon it as done; for he is infinitely rich and good, and wants not our gifts, but is only infinitely desirous of our heart and good will. Increase, then, and dilate thy heart and affections in every action by desires. If thou weepest before God, wish thou couldst bring the whole earth to weep with thee: if thou offerest thy heart, wish thou couldst offer him the hearts and affections of all creatures, and rejoice that he possesses infinite joy and bliss within himself. If thou labourest for him, desire to spend the last drop of thy blood in his service, for so great a master, and so great a glory. Before every action, by a short aspiration, offer it with fervour to God, and beg his grace to do his will in it as perfectly as thy heart is able, saying: "Incline unto my aid," or the like, and wishing it could do it more perfectly, and in a manner worthy of so great and so good a Lord. To supply thy deficiencies, offer the actions of Christ, cover thine with them, to receive an ample benediction, and to pay an

homage worthy of thy God. Thy heavenly Father will no sooner have felt the sweet odour of his Son's garments, but he will accept thy sacrifice, embrace thee tenderly, and enrich thee with his gifts; for "in his beloved Son, he has made us acceptable."—Ephes. i. 6.

But the recompenses promised ought to excite our fervour in good works, which produce an eternal weight of glory. Even a cup of cold water, given for God, will have its reward.—Matt. x. 30. God counts every hair of his elect, every step for his service. What a rich mine is here opened to us? What a wonderful commerce? We give temporal for eternal, light and easy for what is immense. All the actions of our lives are seeds of eternity. Our Saviour assures us of the very smallest, that it shall not lose its reward.—Matt. x. 42. No; it shall shine for perpetual eternities.—Dan. xii. If we neglect to lay up stores of good works now, we shall beg hereafter, when it will be too late. "The slothful man would not plough for the cold. He shall therefore beg in summer, and nothing shall be given him."—Prov. xx. 4. "He shall not be crowned, who has not fought lawfully."—1 Cor. xi. 8. Heaven is our inheritance; but by Adam's fall, we lost our title to it. Christ restored us again to it by his passion, but on condition that it should be to us a kingdom of conquest. It is to be taken by us, as it were, by main force. "The kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent bear it away."—Matt. xi. 12. "What things a man shall have sown by his works, such also shall he reap." My soul, choose a good method, and a good guide or director in the paths of virtue; but do not lightly change or forsake them.

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## MEDITATION VII.

### ON THE DELAY OF REPENTANCE.

1. A DELAY of repentance in a state of mortal sin is a grievous crime.

2. It increases the difficulties of conversion.

3. It is the high road to final impenitence.

1. A great obstacle to souls in the service of God is a delay of repentance. Sinners design to be saved, but put off their conversion from day to day. By this stratagem, the devil secures them

to himself. For it not only holds them in his chains, but is a new sin, and leads ordinarily to final impenitence and eternal reprobation. He who is in a state of mortal sin, and defers his conversion for any considerable time, sins grievously; and this on many accounts. Such a delay is a sin against the charity which he owes to his own soul, by exposing it to the imminent danger of damnation by sudden death, of which there is a moral danger in any considerable space of time. To undertake in such a state a dangerous expedition, or a sea voyage, would undoubtedly be a mortal sin. There is always no less danger of a sudden death during a long delay, considering the innumerable accidents to which human life is subject. Therefore, to live so much unprepared must be a mortal sin and an extreme folly in a point of such utmost consequence. Is there not a moral danger of being surprised by sudden death in any one month, or a less term? Many thousands, doubtless, now suffer in hell, who were suddenly cut off soon after committing one mortal sin. In so important an affair, it must be the greatest madness to sleep, even one night, in such a state, without making a most sincere act of contrition, and forming the warmest purpose of amendment.

He who defers his conversion exposes himself generally to immediate danger of falling into other mortal sins. For experience shows, that a soul remaining wilfully under the slavery of the devil is easily drawn, nay, sinks of herself, continually lower in it. "A sin, which repentance does not blot out, by its own weight draws to another sin," says St. Gregory the Great (Mor. l. 25, c. 9), which sentence has passed from St. Thomas into a maxim of the schools. To some persons, ever so short a delay may be an immediate occasion of sin, and consequently is itself a new mortal sin.

A delay of repentance violates that divine precept: "Defer not to be converted to the Lord."—Eccl. v. 8.

We are obliged to an immediate reconciliation with an offended brother; much more with God, if we have injured him. We are bound immediately to restore what belongs to our neighbour: it must, therefore, be an injustice to God to delay restoring to him the heart which belongs to him.

Such a delay shows an obstinate attachment to sin, and is an interpretative choice of God's enmity. "Hast thou offended God and forgettest it? Behold a second offence and a second enmity," says St. Chrysostom.—(Hom. 42, in 2 Cor.) It is highly to undervalue the divine friendship, the most inestimable

of all goods. These reasons are urged by St. Thomas (2, 28, 29, 62, a. ult.), St. Bonaventure (in 4, Dist. 17, 10, a. 2), St. Antoninus (3 p. tit. 14, c. lv. n. 2), &c.

One who remains in the state of mortal sin loses the merits of all the good works he does for that time. He loses all the advantages for which he lives, who does not live to God, says St. Augustin; "*Perdit quod vivit, qui Deo non vivit.*" To choose such a state must be a strange insensibility to a man's own great interest.

Does not the very misery of his own condition move the sinner to hasten out of it? He is fallen into the stinking mire of sin, and is become horrible in the sight of God and his angels, yet he defers to cleanse himself. Sin, worse than any robber, has stripped his immortal soul of all her spiritual riches and graces, without leaving so much as one; yet he does not hasten to recover so great a treasure. His soul has received a mortal wound; yet he gives it time to grow incurable before he applies a remedy. Had a man drunk poison, could he be one moment at ease till he had taken an antidote to repel it? Had he received a wound in his body, would he put off the cure till it might mortify, and form a gangrene? Had he been robbed of his temporal goods, would he neglect immediately seeking to recover them? Strange blindness, not to do for his immortal soul what he would be so earnest to do for the least temporal commodity! "You wish for a long life," says St. Augustin (Serm. 23, t. 5, p. 109), "only to repent hereafter, and in the meanwhile lead a bad life. Thus, you wish for a long evil. Why do not you rather desire a long good? You would have all other things good, a good garment, a good villa, a good house; you only choose a bad life; and yet you prefer life to all those other things." Expostulate a little, my soul, with the delaying sinner on this insensibility in his own regard: expostulate also with him on his conduct towards God. Let him, if he able, stand the insulting reproaches of his own conscience in the meantime. Let him sink under the confusion with which they must cover him.

God commands, invites, and presses the sinner in the most tender manner to return to him. Hear his sweet voice, my soul. He cries out: "Son, give me thy heart."—Prov. xxiii. 25. It has been long tyrannized over and harassed under the slavery of the devil, the world, and its merciless passions. It has been long a stranger to peace and true comfort. It is mine; it was created only for me, and it can find no rest but in me. Can you refuse so long

to give it peace, to restore it to its centre, and offer it to me, who am its Maker, its happiness, and its God? O souls redeemed by the blood of Christ, framed by the hand of God only to love him, harden not your hearts against his most merciful call. But what do the delayers answer? What I scarcely dare repeat for horror. "Command," say they, "command again: expect, expect again."—Isa. xxviii. 10. "Who ever heard such horrible things?"—Jer. xviii. 13.

Unthinking sinners, is this the manner in which you treat your kindest God? Are these your thanks for his mercies? "Is this what you return to the Lord, O foolish and unwise people."—Deut. xxxii. 6. Because God is so merciful as to have hitherto borne you with patience, you presume to go on offending him, in hopes of the like impunity. "Because sentence is not immediately executed upon the wicked, therefore, the sons of men commit evil without fear."—Eccles. viii. 11. What is this consequence they draw? Because God is good, they will be boldly wicked. O ingratitude! O insensibility! O blasphemy! One would imagine by these proceedings, that sinners take Almighty God only for a God in jest. But he will arise and revenge his own cause, and strike such presumption with his most just, but most terrible judgments. For this delay is not only a horrible crime and presumption, but also the high road to final impenitence.

2. The delaying sinner is on the high road to final impenitence; for he promises himself three things, which are not in his power, viz., time to come, grace, and a will disposed to repent. Each of these points deserves to be considered apart. First, as to the will which he thinks himself most certainly master of, it will, in all appearance, be more averse to the beginning of this work hereafter than it is at present, and it will certainly have much greater difficulties to encounter. For we must observe, that his will cannot form one good true desire towards a conversion without grace, which will be much weakened and withdrawn on one side, whilst he, on the other, becomes every day more and more incapable of seeking God. So that he will only have such a command of his will, such a power as Pharaoh had, such as the sinner absolutely *can*, but, morally speaking, never *will* use, and which will only contribute to his guilt.

He thinks the difficulties too great, for want of courage to undertake the work at present. He would be glad to wait till his chains fall off themselves, and a conversion may cost him no

violence. But his expectation is chimerical and extravagant. Passions can never be overcome, nor habits broken, without conflicts. Difficulties will grow much greater by delay; for by it a sinner is farther removed from God, and more deeply engaged in his criminal habits. As many days of delay, so many sins; as many abuses of grace, so many new chains. If a man found a hundred pounds weight heavy, would he wait till his burden should be increased to a thousand? Or if one single chain was hard to break, would he defer till his fetters were doubled? Yet this is the extravagance of the delaying sinner. Old age itself, which abates the heat of youth, strengthens habits long cherished. "A physician easily cuts off a new distemper; a long sickness perplexes him."—Eccl. x. 12.

The very habit of delaying, and the fear of setting about the work, grow upon the soul exceedingly. This the experience of all ages shows as to delayers. To-morrow consumes years, and spins out the longest age; it is still always to-morrow, never to-day, and at the end farther from beginning than at first. This the very heathen poets and philosophers witness. One of them very justly compares the delayer to a fool, sitting on the bank of a river till the stream run dry, that he may pass over it:

> " . . . . He
> Waits till the river pass away, but lo!
> Ceaseless it flows, and will for ever flow."

And another—till the hindmost chariot-wheel overtake the first.

Penance now seems a burden to him. This is because he has not as yet taken the wings of fervour, and loves still to crawl on the dunghill of his affections. Let him by groans and sighs now invite Jesus into his heart, lay open his miseries to him, and implore his pity and pardon. Thus, his sloth will be expelled, and the difficulties vanish. What will he gain by waiting till these be much increased? Ah! it is now time for him to banish sin from his heart, and rescue it from the chains of the devil. "The time past is sufficient to have fulfilled the will of the Gentiles."—1 Pet. iv. 3. "It is time that an end be put to sin, and that iniquity be blotted out, and eternal justice reign."—Dan. ix. 34.

3. It belongs to the justice of God, and to the fidelity which he owes to himself and to his own threats, to punish and disappoint the delayer's insolence. He is guilty of tempting God many ways, of presuming on his mercy, and of abusing his grace. He arrogates to himself the assurance of time and grace, two things purely in the disposal of God; he fixes to God a time for

his mercy; he designs to defeat his justice by a cheat, and resists his most gracious calls.

He promises to himself, that he shall have time to do penance hereafter. But of time, God has reserved the entire disposal to himself. Who, in his senses, would walk and sleep on the sharp edge of a fatal precipice? You are here every moment in imminent danger of gliding into hell; as every moment some accident may bereave you of life. If you live, what prospect does even life afford? Is continuance in sin a means to incline God to mercy? He who sues for pardon refrains from new insults: these obstruct mercy; they cannot dispose for it.

Besides time, grace is also necessary for a true conversion. And will not God justly refuse to such a presumptuous delay a gratuitous gift, which he owes to no sinner? Such an arrogance certainly calls for this punishment. The deferring sinner designedly would rob God of the best part of his life, and that which he is most jealous of, to consecrate it to the devil; and reserve to him only the wretched remains, the dregs which are the refuse of the world and sin. "*Et de reliquo ejus idolum faciam.*"—Isa. xliv. 19.

What is still more injurious, he endeavours to put a cheat upon Almighty God, and to get heaven by a trick. For what is his conduct better than this? God assures us we cannot enjoy both this world and the next, or join together the pleasures of sin here and his eternal joys. But the wretch intends, as it were, to defeat his threat, and the just law of his providence, by a formal project of enjoying this world; and yet, by an after-game of a late repentance, of gaining heaven in the end. But God is not to be imposed upon by foolish impiety. He is above human cunning. He will defeat such impious, senseless measures. This intended repentance must be his work—his grace must effect it. To punish such insults and presumption, will he not withdraw his more powerful graces, and abandon such a soul to a spiritual blindness, to a false death-bed repentance, or sudden death without even the appearance of any repentance, which will put the seal to her reprobation? "Ye have said: We have struck a bargain with death, and have made a compact with hell. Your bargain with death shall be made void, and your contract with hell shall not stand."—Isaiah, xlviii. 18.

The insult of a delay implies likewise such an open abuse of grace, that, if we again consider the circumstance, we still more clearly see that it is a most heinous crime, and which calls for an

extraordinary vengeance upon the sinner. Can we reflect on the baseness of his conduct, and not cry out in astonishment with the prophet: "God gave him place of repentance, and he abuses it to pride."—Job, xxiv. 23. What is more, God solicits him to return, with the most tender, fatherly affection. He addresses to him his prophets, whose words are daily announced to him, and his ministers rising early in the morning, by whose mouths, both in public and in private, he employs promises, threats, and all other means to conquer his obstinacy. Not content with those exterior calls, he continually speaks to him inwardly in the bottom of his heart, by holy inspirations and remorses; crying out incessantly with a secret, but piercing voice, within his soul, and pressing him now to put an end to his crimes, to give peace to his poor heart, so long worried and torn by black guilt, cruel remorse, and restless passions; to banish thence those hellish fiends, whose chains he so miserably drags and groans under—to renounce a world and pleasures, whose emptiness everywhere pursues him, and to begin to live to God, and to secure present and eternal happiness and joy. The sinner, thus pursued and besieged by the mercies of his God, everywhere and on every side, yet hardens himself against them, shut his ears to these calls, fights against him with his own gifts, making use of his graces and benefits only to offend him and fly in his face, and even to apply them as motives and instruments to sin. Of this God complains: "Thou hast made me serve in thy sins."—Isa. xliii. 24. Can the fidelity he owes to his own justice and honour suffer this? Can he see himself treated more contemptuously than the meanest servant by a base sinner, whom he desires to save only out of mercy, but who bids him go away with his graces, to wait till he has surfeited himself with sin, and then to come and visit him again; can God, I say, see this and bear it? No. He declares by his prophets, that his mercy contemned will at length be converted into fury; that he will answer such a contempt by silence for the future, the most dreadful of all his punishments, and will watch over such ungrateful, insolent souls to their destruction, to which they are in the high road, and which he will suffer them to complete by a false death-bed repentance; or will, perhaps, not afford them even an opportunity of that, suddenly cutting them off in the height of their career, and foreclosing for ever their vain hope. "*Vigilabo super eos in malum.*"—Jer. xliv. 27.

## MEDITATION VIII.

### ON DEATH-BED REPENTANCE.

Sudden death often excludes a possibility of doing penance in the last sickness.

Such a repentance, if performed, is generally false, because only forced.

A conversion then meets with the greatest obstacles.

1. Death-bed repentance is commonly the most wretched and treacherous plank which unthinking delayers are at last, often unawares, reduced to trust their eternity to. It is called a treacherous plank, because the very possibility of procuring it cannot be relied on; and also, if attempted, it is usually false. Often does sudden death prevent the power of so much as thinking of a conversion in a sinner's last moments. What assurance has he that he will be forewarned of its approach? May it not seize him on a sudden, as a vulture does his unattentive prey? May not lightning, a precipice, water, a stone, a chance shot or stroke, a slip of a horse, a fall of a tree or a house, a thief, a treacherous hand, or some other out of a thousand like accidents, in the twinkling of an eye, cut the thread of his life, and in a moment lodge him in hell?

Even barring external accidents, may not a sudden revolution of humours, a violent apoplexy, a polypus of the heart, or some like unforeseen disorder, bereave him of life at once, leaving scarcely one breath of interval between all the signs of perfect health and the sleep of death, or at least the privation of all the senses? Such accidents are common. How often have I heard that one was drowned, found dead in his bed, fallen down dead while walking, conversing at table, at play, or the like? The news of such a death alarmed, indeed, the person's friends; but the case had nothing in it miraculous, nothing at which, according to the common course of things, they ought to be surprised—nothing but what, according to the ordinary laws of nature and Providence, may happen to any man every day of his life. The delaying sinner has, above all others, the greatest reason to apprehend lest, in punishment of his presumption, the just hand of God, which rules and orders all things, may conduct natural causes to be thus the instruments of his vengeance on him.

But he hopes that will not be his misfortune. He must, however, allow that it may be so, and that by his rashness he exposes his eternity to a *perhaps*. Ah! in temporal concerns, in last wills and contracts, men carefully add provisoes and caveats to exclude not only probabilities, but even mere possibilities. But in their all—in the affair of their eternal salvation, they are content to rely on a perhaps, and can sleep under such a dreadful uncertainty; nay, of their own free, deliberate choice, trust it to a thing, for which, above all things in the world, they can the least answer. If sudden deaths were more extraordinary, and examples of them much rarer than they are, yet the deferring sinner ought still to dread his danger from that quarter, by a justly deserved judgment. Moreover, even the deaths of those who die by lingering diseases are, most of them, sudden. Several distempers are treacherous, and do not forebode death by any symptom, before the patient, by a sudden revolution of humours in his body, falls into a short agony, and is soon carried off. Again, deaths, even in distempers, often proceed from some latent inward gangrene, in which cases no danger is prognosticated before death, as its true cause is hidden and foreign to the visible distemper.

When the distemper itself visibly and gradually leads to death, still men most frequently die suddenly. God, to punish the sinner's delay, often permits the spirit of lying to deceive him to the end, as he did with Ahab. "And the Lord said: Who will deceive Ahab? And an evil spirit went forth and stood before the Lord, and said: I will deceive him. I will go forth, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And the Lord said: Thou shalt deceive and prevail."—3 Reg. xxii. 21, 22. So does he permit the lying spirit to deceive the sinner.

He usually flatters himself as long as possible, through the love and hopes of life, and a dread of seriously undertaking the work of his conversion. His friends concur, for fear of alarming him. From the same motive, the physicians generally study to feed him with vain hopes, not to damp his spirits. Thus he goes on, being also himself desirous to be deceived. Even the last efforts of nature, just before his agony, are often interpreted as symptoms of good hopes. It is often not before he is falling into his agony that the danger is openly apprehended. Then the house is in uproar: all cry out, he is dying—he is dying. A priest is sent for, who, perhaps, is sick or absent; an affair which never happened before may have just then, by God's providence, called

him abroad. Or, he comes, indeed, but has not the key of the sinner's heart, nor talents to be of any great use in moving him, who is scarcely in a condition even to think of himself; or, he finds him speechless—unable even to give a squeeze of the hand, or other sign of knowledge; he is, perhaps, out of his senses, or at least already half-dead.

As before a conversion was put off for weeks, months, or seasons, now it is for days, or, at least, hours. He alleges present pains and incapacity, and hopes in an hour or two to be better disposed, and more at his ease. If a confession was more early extorted from him, it was done with so much unwillingness, so much by halves, and so much in the hope of a possibility of recovery, as to be very far from securing his great affair. Thus, the death of the sinner is generally unforeseen and unprepared. If a preparation be thought of, it is lame, and only justifies the old comparison, that "not to repent till the approach of death, is to do like a man who should only begin to dig wells to quench the flames, when his house is already on fire."

In these straits, the enemy easily draws such an unhappy soul into presumption, or into despair, like the miserable man mentioned by St. Gregory the Great, who expired lamentably crying out, without being heard by God, "Truce till morning—truce till morning."

2. Penance done by the sinner only at the sight of death is generally false, because often grounded on motives of natural fear, or, at least, on such as are insufficient for a true conversion and perfect change of heart. He has hitherto put off his repentance, and would still if he could. His disposition for delaying is the same as before. This very habit of deferring reigns still in his heart as much as ever, and hinders him from exerting to the utmost even the weak endeavours he is now capable of. If he do some little, this is only because he sees the power of putting off now taken from him. As he has always been a man of projects and resolutions, such he still remains, and such he dies. He is big with schemes and half-wills—employs himself in them till the last breath, but undertakes nothing perfectly.

His attachments to his other criminal habits equally remain, only their objects are removed for the present. For proof hereof, if he recover, he will continue the same man he was. He, indeed, cries out for pardon, and lifts up his eyes to heaven, but it is only because he sees the earth flying from him, and the divine sword hanging naked over his head. His sorrow is not

for the injury he has done to God, nor out of any sentiment of love of his heavenly Father; but a servile fear is the cause of all his tears. The sovereign Judge, who sounds the heart and judges not by appearances, is not to be imposed upon by such treacherous signs. He sees the root of his sinful passions still lurking in the bottom of his soul; he sees his heart still voluptuous, covetous, ambitious, revengeful, and that his repentance is only self-love and fear. Esau repented with bitter cries; but because it was only on the like motives, not for God, the apostle assures us "he found no place of repentance, although with tears he had sought it."—Heb. xii. 17.

We have in Holy Writ another more terrible instance of the hypocrisy of a death-bed repentance in Antiochus, the illustrious, the wicked King of Syria, who had plundered the temple of the true God in Jerusalem, profaned the holy place, and persecuted God's servants. He was returning again to that city, resolved to make it a heap of stones; but, suddenly struck by God, he falls into a filthy distemper, consumed by worms and excessive pains, and sees himself surrounded with the terrors of death. He now becomes, in appearance, the most perfect penitent. He humbles himself before God, sheds floods of tears, resolves to make the greatest amends possible for his crimes—to declare Jerusalem a free city, and grant the Jews the highest privileges, equal to those of the Athenians; to adorn the holy temple in a royal, magnificent manner, multiply its sacred vessels, and furnish all the expenses for sacrifices. He, moreover, promises to make himself a Jew—even to become an apostle of the true religion, and to walk over the whole earth, to preach in person the power of God. Yet what does the Holy Ghost pronounce of this conversion, which would have canonized any sinner amongst men? "The wicked man prayed the Lord, of whom he was not to obtain mercy."—1 Mac. ix. 13. God saw his heart, and knew all this was only natural fear and self-love, or, at least, far short of the sincere disposition of true repentance. "It is only the impossibity of sinning which makes such a one depart from his sins. He, who only leaves them at the sight of death, does not forsake them, but is forsaken by them," says Salvian of Marseilles, L. 1, p. 348.

3. Sincere repentance will appear extremely difficult, and a rare miracle of an extraordinary grace in a dying sinner, if we consider the great obstacles it has then to encounter. Headaches, pains, weakness both of body and mind, disturbance and

uneasiness, grief at the separation from friends and the world, with all its admired idols, which captivated the heart, and sometimes, also, the hurry to settle temporal affairs, render him almost incapable of anything. Ah! it is a great deal for even habitual, perfect virtue to maintain itself in such a case. The sinner's inveterate sloth to all spiritual things, and his being unacquainted with the method of forming the necessary acts of virtue, must be much increased under these difficulties. His old passions will still defend themselves obstinately in his heart, and even be stronger than ever, as he will be then more incapable of using that violence which is necessary to weaken them. It is a mistake to imagine, that passions, rooted in the soul by long habits, die of themselves in sickness, or at the sight of death. They may lie dormant for want of power, but they hold the heart as strongly as ever. "His bones shall be filled with the vices of his youth, and they shall sleep with him in the dust."—Job, xx. 11. Impiety, avarice, ambition, pride will still live in his heart. Such as he has lived, such he remains in his sickness, and such he dies. "Their end shall be according to their works."—2 Cor. xi. 12. The rooting out of habitual passions, in the ordinary course of things, is not the work of one day, but requires a chain of vigorous endeavours; and such efforts, such earnest prayer, such violences, are not to be looked for commonly under a mortal sickness.

God forbid a death-bed repentance should be deemed impossible, and that any sinner brought so far should fall into despair. In that of the good thief on the cross, God has given sinners an example that no one need despair; but it is a single one, that no one might presume, says St. Augustin. And it is an example so singular in all its circumstances, that it can by no means refer to the sinner who has long resisted the calls of God, and deferred his conversion by a premeditated design. An extraordinary miracle of grace may be granted to a sinner who has not lived in a continual abuse of grace; but can it be expected to be the happy lot of him who has, by a formed plot, as it were, of cheating God's justice in the end, made use of his mercy to insult his goodness? His threats of abandoning presumptuous sinners must certainly regard such as these in the first place. "I go away, and you shall seek me, and shall die in your sins."—John, viii. 21. "Then they shall invoke me, and I will not hear them."—Prov. i. 28.

If a true minister of God be called to assist such a dying sinner, what are his alarms, what is the confusion of his thoughts? The sinner may cry out to him, with King Saul to Samuel: "I am in mortal anguish, and am straitened exceedingly on every side. '*Coarcto nimis.*' Therefore I have called thee to show me what I must do in the extremity in which I find myself."—1 Reg. xxviii. 16. What answer would that faithful minister give him? Were he to speak his own just fears, might he not say, with Samuel: "Why hast thou disturbed me to come hither? Why dost thou ask me, seeing the Lord has departed from thee?"—"*Quare inquietasti me ut suscitarer? Quid interrogas me, cum Dominus recesserit a te?*" He dares not, indeed, put bounds to the infinite mercies and power of God. Therefore he suppresses his fears in his own breast, and performs all the duties of his ministry with all possible attention, but trembling lest the last sacraments be sacrileges, and only the seals of that unfortunate soul's reprobation; rather adoring in his heart the judgments of God, "who is terrible in his counsels above the sons of men," Ps. lxv. 5, "and the power of whose choler no man knows," Ps. lxxxix. 11, than comforting himself in the hope of his mercies.

The sentiments of the fathers are delivered to us by the author of the book on penance long ascribed to St. Ambrose, but who was Victor, a pious and learned African prelate of the fifth age. Thus he writes (L. de Pœnit. c. 18, t. 4. Op. St. Ambr.): "If any one asks penance in his last sickness, and, being reconciled, departs this life, I own, we do not deny him what he desires, but I do not presume to say he departs well. I do not presume; I do not promise; I say nothing; I do not deceive or flatter you. The Christian that lives well dies secure. He who does penance whilst in health, and afterwards lives well, is secure. A man must renounce sin before penance, and whilst in health; he knows not whether in sickness he can receive penance, and confess his sins to God and the priest. But doing penance at the last and being reconciled, I am not secure that he departs secure. I can give him penance, but can give him no assurance. Do I say he will be damned? No. But neither do I say he will be saved. Wouldst thou avoid what is uncertain? Do penance whilst thou art well. Then thou art secure, because thou couldst yet sin. But if thou dost penance, when thou canst not now sin, sins have forsaken thee, not thou them. Leave the uncertain, lay hold on the certain."

## MEDITATION IX.

### ON HUMAN RESPECT.

1. To be deterred from embracing Christian perfection, for fear of what the world will say, is a crime most injurious to God. 2. Most base in itself. 3. And an extreme folly.

1. We owe, by the law of charity, a respect and a regard to every neighbour, also a deference and complaisance in things indifferent, or in such as are good; but, then, we owe to God the supreme duty and homage, which no regard to creatures can ever authorise us to trespass against. Yet a desire to please men and gain their applause, or a fear of their raillery and displeasure, often draws us into condescensions against our duty to God.

This is frequently a great obstacle, deterring souls from the practice of virtue. Every one has relations, friends, and a neighbourhood. This forms a world with regard to him, with which he finds himself linked by the various engagements of civil life. Upon the least change in his conduct, even in actions perfectly indifferent, or whether for better or worse, many set themselves up as judges and censors, and make his person the common subject of their discourse, ordinarily to condemn him of levity, indiscretion, pride, hypocrisy, or whatever their idle or malicious fancy suggests; and this especially in any change to piety which may seem a tacit reproach of their own tepidity or licentiousness. The fear of such censures often affrights people from daring to undertake a perfect conversion, or embrace a state of true virtue; and this is one of the great and most successful engines which the devil employs to make many of our resolutions of serving God abortive, and also to draw many into sin.

Now, nothing can be more injurious to God than this base cowardice of human respect. For it puts in opposite scales the infinite majesty of God and a vile world, and in the heart, though not in words says thus to God: I would serve you, but I cannot break with the world, nor bear its jeers and censures; I would please you, if I could do it without displeasing the world. Is not this positively to prefer the world, and the least and basest part of the world, to God, in choosing rather to offend him than lose the false suffrages and senseless esteem of men?

It is the first and most essential law of religion, that we pay

to God a love of preference infinitely above all creatures, and this by all ways, speculatively, in actions and in the real sentiments of the soul. Only to put him in competition with created beings, would be an unparalleled affront. But here the basest, the most unjust, and most fickle of things is preferred to the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth, to our infinite benefactor and last end.

Every faithful servant of God says with the Apostle, that neither death, nor things present, or to come, shall ever separate him from the love of Christ. But here a petty human respect, the fear of a few impotent, senseless, and impious tongues does what no tyrants or tortures, nor all the powers of the world or of hell, ought ever to effect.

A traitor, who, even to save his life, has betrayed his prince or country, is justly the abomination of all mankind, even of those whom he serves by his perfidy. Much more so must he be who renounces his allegiance to his God for the world, nay, for the most empty and frail thing in the world. We abhor the very names of those wretches who apostatize from their faith for fear of torments; but are ourselves guilty of a greater baseness, if we are ashamed of God for much less than gibbets and death. Our indignation, then, ought to be turned against ourselves. Can we call ourselves brothers, in faith, of the martyrs, or even look up towards those generous soldiers of Christ? We are afraid of a look, or of a passing word which we apprehend will be spoken behind our backs; whereas they professed boldly their faith in the cross of Christ, when nothing was considered as more ignominious. They trembled not in the presence of the lords of the universe threatening racks and fires; they feared not their displeasure nor that of whole kingdoms; they spilt their blood amidst the insults of their friends and the hissings of whole amphitheatres. All this ignominy of the world was their glory in the secrets of their hearts, because for Christ.

If we are not called to so great a trial from the world as the martyrs, we have all of us something to suffer from this sworn enemy of God's service. Never was one converted to God, who had not some threats of the world to despise. Had Magdalene feared the scorn of the Pharisee's assembly, she had never been a saint; nor David a penitent, if he had dreaded that of his whole kingdom. Of which he says: "I put on sackcloth, and was become the fable of the whole city. I was the subject of the discourses and satires at every table."—Ps. lxviii. 12, 13. "But I prayed to you, O Lord. Not regarding the tongues of men, I was only solicitous to obtain your mercy."

2. But cowardly Christians sometimes invent a salvo. They say they will pray, fast, and practise virtue in private, and only exteriorly conform to the world, to escape its ridicule. In this they condemn themselves, for is God and his service an object to be ashamed of before the world? Is not he to be confessed and honoured publicly? Most certainly he is, as the very light of nature itself proclaims. We owe this to our neighbour's edification; we owe it to the sovereign honour of God, whose holy name and service we are always openly to profess, glory in, and to carry on our foreheads.

Christ will be ashamed of those before his heavenly Father, who are ashamed of him before men.—Luke, ix. 25. What a confusion will it be to a soul at the last day, and for eternity, to see her base human respect represented in its true colours before God, whom she so pusillanimously was ashamed of, before Christ in his glory, all the angels and heavenly courts, and all men and devils? What railleries and insults will she then receive from all creatures, even from those whom here she preferred to her God? What intolerable shame will she be overwhelmed with, not able for one moment to hide her ignominious head? How will she herself blush at, and not be able to look in the face, nor yet to turn her eyes from, her most preposterous unjust shame of what is the highest object of all glory!

How can you hope to satisfy those, whose very composition is malice, who are never content with themselves, and who for the most part know not what they themselves would have? These are men who are enemies to reason and virtue, who will find something to condemn in all that you can do; and who, if you were to work miracles, would say they were impostures or enchantments, and call you a false and designing man. If you are prudent and weigh well your actions and words, how can you please those who are foolish, light, and indiscreet, and condemn before they understand? It is the misfortune of the wise, that they are judged by the foolish, or ignorant, and base, and who condemn whatever they do not understand at first sight. The world is full of foolish or envious persons. What will you do to please the latter, whose envy passes for zeal, and to whom passion seems reason, which it banishes?

This human respect is not only most injurious to God, but also a sentiment most base in itself. For what is this censure it so much dreads? What is this world, which it so much fears to displease? It consists of a few libertines, a fickle mob that judges without knowledge, reason, truth, or virtue; and without any

power to hurt us; without authority, right, or justice. The world is so inconstant in its censures or applauses, that often on the same point it changes as suddenly as the wind, and highly commends what it justly before condemned; of which the life of our Saviour on earth was a perpetual example. Its judgment, even in temporal things, is ever so uncertain, that they who most court it are often the most severely condemned by it, even in what they sought its approbation of; as the heathens have taught us, by their fable of the man and his ass. It generally pronounces falsely, and against the rules of virtue and reason, and always rashly, without sufficient knowledge, by passion, whim, and caprice; out of pride, or to follow the torrent, especially when it censures virtue, as in this case it is exasperated on seeing its own vices condemned by the example of one who embraces a more regular conduct; which it therefore condemns in words, not to be obliged to imitate it; though, at the same time, even they, who thus decry and ridicule it by their tongues, usually admire and envy it in their hearts. For such is the beauty, amiableness, and honour of virtue, that even the wicked cannot but highly esteem it, and acknowledge it as something greater than crowns and sceptres, and far above the world; their fury against it seldom lasts long. Their malice and injustice are ordinarily overcome by its meekness and constancy; and, by being contemned by it, even its enemies at last become its open applauders. They often will think it a happiness to treat with these persons, and find not more solid consolation than in their probity, prudence, and fidelity; nor any secure shelter in their fears and necessities, but in having recourse to them. Hence the Wise Man says of virtue (Sap. viii. 10): "I shall have glory with the multitude, and honour with princes; I shall appear wonderful in the sight of the powerful; and shall leave an eternal memory to those that shall be after me." Such is this formidable enemy; nay, it often is a mere phantom, subsisting only in the affrighted imagination of these timorous souls, and has no existence.

Besides, this world has no power, by its censure, to hurt any servant of God, nor right to judge him. Ah! what can the cries of all the world do against us? We are like fearful beasts, that start at shadows. Suppose the worst that men can do, if we but please God, what need we mind their false judgment? If God justifies us, it matters not who condemns us: if God be with us, it is of no moment who are against us. Let us fear his sentence, which is truth, and which is to decide our eternal lot;

but as to men, let us never so much as consider what their verdict or opinion of our actions is, which is much less dangerous to us, if it condemn, than if it applaud them. Let, then, the world cry, it can only disturb the birds of the night that fear its phantoms, but cannot touch or scare one who is, in earnest, desirous to become a servant of God. "I regard not the being judged by you, or by man's day."—1 Cor. iv. 3.

Again, as the world has no right to judge, it is a base slavery to subject the conduct of our lives to its extravagant caprice, even in ordinary actions and indifferent things. To regulate ourselves by its unsteady and false rule in anything whatsoever, is abominable. But it is most of all so, to enslave to it our conscience and virtue, which, above all things, ought to be most free. To serve others in their temporal necessities and concerns, according to our circumstances and station in the world, is a point of charity, and sometimes of strict duty; but to subject ourselves to others, and bind ourselves to serve them in things essentially free, and which we owe to ourselves or others, and this out of fear of them, is a baseness not to be expressed. Our bodies, indeed, we may subject to others in bondage, if necessity require it; though a man born free, and of valour and spirit, would defend his corporal liberty with his life, rather than sell it for an unjust slavery. But our soul is above all things essentially free, and particularly so in the indispensable duties of religion, in the service of God, in the affair of eternity. In this the dignity of our nature, and our allegiance to God, forbid us ever to become slaves. As we owe this to God, to ourselves, and to the edification of our neighbour, it would be the greatest injustice, as well as the most shameful baseness, to enslave ourselves to a weak, inconstant, foolish world, nay, to a frown or a word of one of its most contemptible members, as human respect doth. In everything else we serve you, said the Hebrews to King Pharaoh, when his slaves in Egypt, but we must be free to go into the wilderness to sacrifice to the God of Israel.

What are the noble sentiments which nature engrafts in our hearts, and which religion infinitely raises and enhances in this particular? How do we admire them in the saints! who, on one side, always boldly professed by their conduct that they knew no other glory than what is placed in the service of God, and regarded it as the greatest mark of honour to suffer ignominy amongst men for it; while, on the other side, they scorned and pitied a wicked, blind world. When faith in a God crucified was

looked upon as a scandal and a folly both by Jews and Gentiles, and by all the great and wise ones of the world, St. Paul cried out, with a true generosity, in their fullest assemblies, and before their tribunals: "I blush not at the gospel."—Rom. i. When all Israel adored the golden calves of Jeroboam, how did Tobias go constantly alone to Jerusalem to the temple of the Lord? Consider Eleazar, the Maccabees, Susanna, St. Thomas, of Canterbury, all the saints and holy martyrs, how they generously despised threats, disgrace, and the most ignominious persecutions. On the contrary, full of evangelical courage and liberty, they even regarded the railleries and censures of the world as their gain and their glory, and justly scorned them. In temporal things and of the world, nothing is more glorious than to despise an unjust and foolish contempt. But raillery never is more frivolous—never more deserves contempt, than when it attacks virtue and the honour of God. For us, therefore, not to have the courage to despise it, in what we ourselves judge it most deserves to be despised, and to sacrifice to it the very duties of our religion, our souls, and the service of God, is a pusillanimity so base, that it is impossible to find a name for it. We can certainly no more boast of a greatness of soul, if we once voluntarily pass under so shameful a yoke.

This baseness is so much the greater, because it implies the most notorious injustice against God, as well as against ourselves. For God is the judge of our souls; and shall we have any true courage, if we dare not defend the interests of our God, and maintain what we owe him, especially against his declared enemy, and an antagonist the most despicable and impotent? Remember, my soul, I am not my own master, much less am I the world's. I have the honour to belong to God by all manner of titles, and I am inalienably his, and raised to a most eminent dignity in his family. I am his creature, formed by his hands, enriched with his gifts, redeemed by his blood, heir of his glory, and, as a Christian, engaged by a solemn profession to fight his battles. Shall I yet, instead of arming myself with courage and defending his cause, abandon and betray him for a false and base world, which conduct would be unpardonable even in a mercenary?

As a Christian, I am particularly obliged to despise the world; this I bound myself to by my baptismal vows, in which I solemnly renounced it; this the example of my divine Master ought to encourage me to. He himself was hated and censured

by the world, and thus foretold to all his followers the like portion: "If the world hates you, know that it hated me first."—John, xv. 18.

3. This most base cowardice is likewise an extravagant folly. To call the judgment of others false and mad, and yet to pay a deference to it, so far as for it to be afraid of professing virtue, must be still a greater frenzy, and a more unaccountable contradiction to sense and reason. Would a wise man, if he were in the midst of sick or mad people, be ashamed of being in health or in his senses? If the world calls us fools, we will answer that it is mad; and we have truth itself, God, and all his servants on our side, when we say so. This folly will appear more notorious, if we consider that this world is not only a bedlam in its judgment on virtue, but also a *Babel*, in which every one speaks a different language, and every one changes his judgment more easily than the wind veers about from one point of the compass to another, usually grounding it on passion or prejudice. Hence the proverb: "He who would please everybody will please nobody."

No prudent man will ever commit an affair of importance, even in temporal concerns, to a mob. It is a just thought of a great wit, that it is a commendation to be that which a crowd of fools call singular. There can hardly be a more severe thing said to a man in this age, than that he is like the rest of the world. What strange extravagance, then, must it be to value such a judgment in the service of God, as to which, above all things, the world is the most incompetent and unqualified court?

The folly of human respect appears more extraordinary, if we reflect, that every Christian knows the world to be the declared enemy of God, and of our souls; which has declared war against us as we have against it. Virtue must ever displease it. Who then can regard its censure? Doth any one ask or follow the advice of an enemy?

The world's censure is a great sign of Christ's approbation. A virtue applauded by it is justly to be suspected as not true, nor the work of God. Its praises of our generosity, courtesy, or humility, give reason to apprehend they were but human and false virtues; or, at least, expose us to the danger of losing their reward by a mixture of human motives creeping into them. The humiliation of its frowns purifies our heart and intention, and secures us the applause of heaven. "If I please men, I should not be a servant of Christ," says the Apostle, Gal. i. 10. And Christ has fore-

warned us: "If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you."—John, xv. 20. Thus our divine Master himself was treated by it. He tells us, that if he had been of this world it would have fought for him; but, that as he came to declare war against it, in return it became his persecutor. Thus it is of all his true followers, as their lives are the condemnation of its vanity and corruption. It ought, then, to be our glory and our joy, to find it declare itself our persecutor; and to court its approbation is a folly, and a contradiction to the principles of our religion. It was thus the saints looked upon it: and this raised them above the dangers both of its vain displeasure and its false praises. St. Paulinus, a noble Roman senator, having renounced his dignity, honours, and estate for Christ, leading an obscure, austere life in solitude and extreme poverty, sometimes not having so much as a little salt to his pulse, rejoiced to hear the world bark at him, and all his own relations and friends conspire to tear him in pieces, and accuse his very retreat of melancholy, and of a thousand sinister and false motives. His answer to all their calumnies and satires was: "It is an happy injury to displease you with Christ."—"*O beata injuria, displicere cum Christo.*"—Ep. 29. As he was himself a great scholar in every branch of polite literature, and an excellent poet, his old master, the famous poet Ausonius, regretted extremely his loss in the world; and in verses and letters yet extant, entirely in a worldly spirit, accused him, in the bitterest terms, of inexcusable madness and extravagance. The saint in his mild and beautiful answer, in elegant verse, tells him, it was his desire and pleasure to be persecuted, reviled, and calumniated even by his friends; that all reproaches for Christ were most agreeable to him, and that he mattered not to pass for a fool in the judgment of men or the world, provided he could gain the approbation of his eternal King.

"Christi sub nomine probra placebunt."—CARM. 10, v. 186.

"Stultus diversa requirentibus esse
Nil moror, æterno mea dum sententia Regi
Sit sapiens."—CARM. 10, v. 265.

But even the world at length opened its eyes, and this saint's virtue became its admiration. His reputation drew men from every corner of the empire, only to see and converse with him in his poor cottage or cell, as St. Augustin and St. Jerom witness.

If any one should say, it is not the censure of the giddy mob, but that of persons of honour and virtue, or of worthy friends or parents which I fear, let him reflect, that even this is no less des-

picable, if it oppose the interests of virtue. If they are really persons of great virtue and prudence, they will the sooner open their eyes, and condemn their own unreasonable invectives. In the meantime, let St. Jerom be heard; he writes thus to Heliodorus, who was detained by his parents and family from engaging in a monastic life in the desert, p. 6, t. 4, par. 2: "Though your father hang on your neck—though your mother show you her breasts, with her hair dishevelled and her garments rent—though your father throw himself across the threshold, walk over your father; fly with dry eyes to the standard of the cross. It is piety to be cruel in this." Elias, a novice under St. Bernard, to whose monastery he had fled from his parents, when they would force him out of the severe retreat he had just taken refuge in, writes to them in these words dictated by his master, St. Bernard: "In this, I am not to obey you—in this, I do not own you parents, but enemies. If you loved me, you would rejoice, because I go to your and my common Father, the parent of all. 'If any one come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, he cannot be my disciple,' says Christ, Luke, xiv. 26."—St. Bernard, Ep. iii. p. 119.

It must be added, that this cursed human respect is again the more criminal, base, and foolish, as, upon the most empty phantom, it makes all the means of salvation fruitless. This hindered the conversion of many at the preaching of our divine Redeemer: "Many of the chief men also believed in him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him. For they loved the glory of men more than the glory of God."—John, xii. 42, 43. And thousands still continually are lost by the same stratagem. If a sinner be moved, if he form good resolutions, this base, senseless shame makes all abortive. He is afraid of putting them in execution—is afraid that a greater regularity may appear in his manners, and he become the talk of the world, which is without mercy to all who forsake it. Even at death, this fear of men will still sway him; he is even then afraid of repentance, of restitution for injustice, calumnies, and detractions, of reparation for injuries and contumelies. He loves the glory of men. We live, indeed, in an age, in which the profession of the gospel is honourable; otherwise, would such souls embrace even faith itself? Ah! "I am saved, if I am not ashamed of my God," cries out Tertullian.—"*Salvus sum, si non confundar de Domino meo.*" O cursed, foolish, base, and impious shame, how many souls dost thou hold in infidelity, heresy, and error! How many, called by God to a state of per-

fection, or to an eminent practice of virtue, dost thou keep back and ruin! How many precious graces dost thou destroy, and convert into judgments! Ah! my soul, whenever the interest of God or virtue calls, never be so base as to listen to the world or to a shameful fear of what it will say. This triumph over it will be a new subject of joy and glory, and an additional victory and crown; a second just agreeable sacrifice to thy God, whose will thou thus declarest that thou lovest and seekest as thy only good. Never so far forget him as to raise imaginary fears in thyself about what men will say of thee. When they do really censure thee, rejoice thereat, hoping thou art then made a true disciple of thy divine Master. Seek only the approbation of God, and glory from him at the last day, which will be holy, solid, great, and eternal in the eyes of the whole universe. But it will be glorious, even before men, to despise the world, and to triumph over it for the sake of virtue; rather to lose our lives, than be guilty of the least known untruth.

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## MEDITATION X.

### ON VENIAL SIN.

To obtain a complete sense of the enormity of venial sin, let us first examine the judgment which Almighty God appears to pass upon it; secondly, its pernicious effects upon the soul.

1. Let us consider whether God regards venial sin as a small evil. His judgment of it cannot be false, as he is justice, equity, and truth. He shows it to be a most enormous evil, seeing he punishes it with terrible severity in his greatest friends and servants. Moses, that man of meekness, and frequently a model of all other virtues, above all men on earth; that man of miracles, appointed by heaven the God of Pharaoh, that is, invested with the power and authority of God over that haughty king; the greatest of the prophets, God's immediate ambassador both to his enemies and to his own people, and his interpreter, by whose mouth he was pleased to give his law, and promulgate his greatest promises to men; that man, again, who had undergone so many labours and dangers, and suffered so many contradictions and trials for God's honour and for his people; I say, that eminent saint and great lawgiver, after all was excluded from the land of promise, in

punishment of one venial sin. That he might see his people put in possession of that fruitful land, flowing with milk and honey, promised long before by God to Abraham, had been the object of his longing wishes, fatigues, projects, battles, and earnest prayers, during forty years, all spent under the greatest hardships for that purpose. Yet God denies him that favour, and declares to him and Aaron: "Because you did not believe me to sanctify me before the children of Israel, you shall not lead these people into the land, which I give unto them."—Num. xx. 12. This distrust, for which God reproves him, seems to have been a doubt of a moment, whether he could work the miracle of producing a spring out of the rock, at his striking it in favour of so rebellious and disobedient a people, as St. Austin, qu. 19. in Num.; St. Chrysostom, in Ps. 105; Theodoret, in Num. 20, &c., gather from the text. Moses prayed most earnestly that God would forgive him that offence, and remit the punishment mentioned, as the mercy was a favour most dear to his heart. Yet, the Almighty would not be moved to mitigate his sentence, either by his fears, or for the sake of his past labours and virtues. "Lord God," said Moses to him, "I will pass and see this very good land, and that rich mountain. And the Lord was angry with me on your account, and did not hear me, and said, Thou shalt not pass that Jordan."—Deut. iii. 24, 25.

Oza seeing the holy ark, as it was drawn by the cattle, lean on one side, touched it with his hand, to support it, for which he was suddenly struck dead (2 Kings, vi. 7); because it was, out of reverence, forbidden for any, except the priests, to touch it; though, according to Josephus, Oza himself was a Levite, not a simple layman. King David, in punishment of a little vanity and curiosity in numbering his people, saw 70,000 of them swept off by a pestilence.—2 Kings, xxiv. 15. Lot's wife was, upon the spot, turned into a pillar of salt for looking back to see Sodom, her country, in flames.—Gen. xix. 16. The holy King Ezechias showed his treasures with a little vanity to the ambassadors of Baladan, the King of Babylon, and straight the prophet Isaias came to denounce to him from God, that, in punishment thereof, all these riches should be carried away into Babylon, his nobles and people led captives, and his sons made eunuchs and slaves in the King of Babylon's palace.—4 Kings, xx. 17; Isa. xxxix. We read in the third book of Kings, ch. xiii., that a certain prophet was sent by God to Bethel, in Samaria, to curse King Jeroboam's idolatrous altar. He boldly exposed himself to martyrdom, and

executed his commission; and when Jeroboam's hand, which he had stretched out to command him to be apprehended, was withered, he restored it again by a miracle. Having refused to eat with that king, or receive any present from him, and obeyed God's orders in everything, to the danger of his life, returning home, he was deceived by a false prophet into a small, undesigned transgression, in being prevailed upon to eat with him. In punishment of this, he was killed by a lion on his road; yet the beast touched not his body, but stood by and guarded it. God would thus chastise his sin, to deter others from the smallest offences; but caused the lion to guard his corpse, to show us that his sin was venial, and expiated by his death, as is observed by the fathers and interpreters. St. Augustin, 1. de Cura pro Mort. c. 7; St. Gregory the Great, Dial. 1. 4, c. 24; Theodoret, St. Eucherius, &c.

But why do we seek such remote examples of the severity with which God punishes venial sin, seeing we might discover it in the miseries we ourselves suffer did we behold the causes of them all? When we groan under them, how bitter are our tears and complaints? What would not we give to remove them? Alas! we should do better to learn in them the malice of sin, to consider their cause only, mount up to their source, and to repent of and avoid all sin, for the most heavy temporal afflictions may be the just punishment only of venial sin.

But the punishments of sin in this life are light, and inflicted in mercy, that, being borne and sanctified by patience, they may expiate our sins at a cheaper rate, and prevent the heavier pains of purgatory. Could our eyes penetrate into those dungeons, we should there truly see how grievous an evil one venial sin is, which deserves such intolerable torments. We should there see souls which had lived faithful to God, and had done and suffered much, very much for his honour—souls even now adorned with his sanctifying graces, and all the other gifts and privileges of his infinite love; souls even now loving him above all things, and accepting these his scourges with patience, resignation, and love, both of him and of his strict justice; reciprocally also loved infinitely by him as his most dear spouses, children, and declared heirs, yet suffering more than knives or fires could effect, or the most inhuman tyrants invent—more than any tongue can express or heart conceive; and all this only for one venial sin. Oh! how grievous an evil must it be! God shuts heaven's gates against his dearest and most faithful servants, if infected in the least with it, and inflicts on

them the most severe punishment. "That fire, though not eternal, is wonderfully grievous, and exceeds all pains which any ever suffered in this life," says St. Austin, 1. de Cur. pro Mort. c. 8; and St. Cæsarius, Hom. 8: "It is greater than any pain in this world can be felt or imagined."

2. We shall farther discover the evil of venial sin, if we consider its most pernicious effects; for it deprives a soul of very great good, and of many advantages, causes her much mischief, and leads her still into more terrible evils. First, it robs her of much good; for, as it defiles her spiritual beauty, it makes her less agreeable to God, and renders all her actions and virtues less pleasing in his sight. "As anything that is touched by one defiled will be itself defiled, so that people before my face, says the Lord, and so all the work of their hands, and all things which they have offered there, shall be defiled."—Aggæus, xi. 15. Also, as venial sin darkens the purity and cleanness of the soul, it disturbs and diminishes her inward happiness, peace, and tranquillity. Again, it is an obstacle to the consolations and other gifts of the Holy Ghost, who, often for venial sin, leaves a soul dry in prayer; without sentiment in the divine praises, and in approaching the sacraments—without compunction in the meditation of spiritual truths—without any relish of heavenly consolation. The divine Spirit, seeing the heart tainted with sin, withdraws his special gifts. "Our sins cause the separation between us and God."—Isa. lix. 2.

Venial sins likewise retard the soul's progress to perfection. They are as so many clouds between the soul and the divine light, which can only enter a soul in proportion as she is more empty and free from them. Whence the spouse always repeats, with deep sentiments of compunction,—Cant. xi. 15: "Catch for us the little foxes, which destroy the vineyards; for our vineyard is blossomed." Our soul has flowered with holy desires; already some buds and fruit appear, and give hopes of a plentiful vintage. Let us destroy the little foxes, which will otherwise ruin it, and blast all our rising hopes.

Venial sin deprives a soul of God's extraordinary graces, and very much diminishes his ordinary ones. He is liberal in the effusion of his graces, but to those only who bring faithful and generous hearts. Any infidelity shuts his bountiful hand, and nothing so much invites his goodness as an exact fidelity. This is truly the work of perfect love, to be faithful in the minutest points. "What is little is little; but it is very great to be faithful

in the least things," says St. Aug. 1. de Doctr. Christ. c. 18. Thus the evil deprives a soul of much good.

Venial sin also brings great detriment and mischief to a soul. Though it destroys not habitual charity entirely in her, yet it impairs it. Did we know, as the blessed, or as the souls in purgatory now do, how incomparably precious, how inestimable every degree of sanctifying grace is, we should look upon the least loss or diminution in it as an extreme evil. Again, venial sin is an indisposition and a wound of the soul, though not such as to cause immediate death. Do we reason thus of the body? It is but a passing curable illness; so not to be avoided. It is but a wound in an arm or leg; it is but the loss of a hand or an eye, and will not be the cause of my death. Or, is not a spiritual wound of the soul much more to be dreaded than any in the body, or even its death many times over? St. Teresa inculcated this most earnestly. She writes thus to her dear nuns (1. de Concept. Divin. Am. c. 2): "Take notice of one thing, and always remember it for my sake. If you are pricked but with a pin, will you not feel it? or with a thorn, though it be never so small? Will not, then, the soul feel the least transgression?"

Especially if these transgressions be multiplied, they strangely weaken and disfigure the poor soul, covering her all over with heaps of sores, ulcers, and hideous deformities. Hence St. Cæsarius, Hom. 50. inter Op. S. Aug.: "Though they do not give mortal wounds, like murder, yet all united together, as an universal spreading sore, so disfigure the beauty of the spouse as to separate her from the chaste embraces of her heavenly bridegroom, who is spotless and beautiful above the sons of men, unless they be cut off and healed by daily penance." We must also observe with St. Gregory Nazianzen, Serm. 7: "That, if the spots upon richer and more shining garments appear worse, those which defile a spiritual soul, beautified by God, must be most ugly and terrible." Add, that the more filthy the ordure is, the nastier and worse will the stain be. But nothing can be more so than base earthly affections upon an incorporeal soul.

Venial sins, moreover, like little wounds, weaken the soul, and are a burden, hindering her from rising to heavenly things, making her heavy, tepid, and slothful to virtue or good works. They are so many clouds obscuring the light of spiritual truths—so many loads weighing her down from soaring high towards God—so many chains binding the hands, and impeding the free practice of good works. The motion of a clock is often stopped by a little dust in

one wheel. A little bird-lime will clog the wings of a bird, or one small thread of a net hamper it, so that it will fall a prey to the fowler.

Again, every venial sin retards the soul from the possession of heaven after death. It is a debt which must be paid to the last farthing. By multiplying such transgressions, how do we increase the enormous schedule of our debts to God, which must be all paid, and the divine justice entirely satisfied! God puts down all in his great accounting book. He keeps an exact register of all our distractions, idle looks, vain desires, unprofitable thoughts or words; of all our least omissions, neglects, and infidelities.

If venial sin be terrible, on account of the evils it causes, it is far more so if we consider those much greater ones to which it leads a soul. It disposes to mortal sin, and, what is worse, to a state of slothfulness and insensibility under it; and this many ways. On one side, it weakens charity, the spiritual life of the soul, and impairs her strength, just as little repeated corporal sicknesses, long hanging on, do that of the body. It deprives her, also, of God's special protection, by which he wards off dangers, or grants extraordinary succours under them. It makes the succours of his actual graces more sparing; for those he bestows in proportion to our good use of them, and withdraws them in punishment of the least infidelities. On the other side, it fills the heart daily more and more with creatures, and fetters it with earthly attachments; it strengthens concupiscence and self-love, together with the whole brood of its passions, which, by insensible degrees, grow furious and masterless. Hence the law of God seems a painful yoke, and the unction of the Holy Ghost is banished. In this situation, the spiritual life of the soul must be very languishing, and can never support itself long. Still the wounds are repeated, till it be quite lost. As the carpenter's repeated blows drive in the wedge farther every time till the block is at last split; as a little chink neglected will sink the largest vessel; as a spark undiscovered, and not put out, will raise a dreadful fire; as one drop of blood in a human body extravasated in the lungs, and not expectorated, will ulcerate the organ, and at last cause death; so, in the spiritual life, venial sin multiplied, and not wiped away, leads to the most fatal death. All the greatest falls have small beginnings. No man becomes very wicked on a sudden. Lesser commencements pave the road first; and the greater these have been, the more desperate is the precipice to which they lead.

Not only grace is withdrawn, and the passions strengthened;

but also the supports and pillars of a virtuous life are ruined by reiterated venial sins. How, then, can it stand? The strongest edifice must fall, if its pillars are taken away. The commonwealth subsists by its laws. These are the supports of its discipline, peace, and good order; and if they fall into contempt, or begin to be trampled upon, the state must sink, and become a company of highwaymen, and a Babel of lawless confusion. Hence, Aristotle observes (Politic. l. 5), that the first thing to make a republic flourish and long maintain itself is, that its laws be exactly observed. The rules or constitutions are the same to a religious house. A facility of transgressing the smaller rules is apt to creep in, under various pretences; and this, if it once gets footing, is sure very soon to ruin the best discipline and most flourishing house, and become the bane of all good in it. Therefore, every well governed monastery is extremely solicitous, that none of its rules be contemned or habitually neglected, be they ever so small or seemingly trivial. Good purposes and the exercise of virtue are, in the same manner, the means by which piety maintains itself. If relaxation be once admitted, it will infallibly gain apace, and the fabric soon fall. Nothing, then, is more important than to avoid all habitual transgressions of the smallest duties; for they sap the very foundations of a virtuous life, as small extravagant expenses, if daily multiplied, will ruin any estate. The Holy Ghost, therefore, gives this advice: "Keep the law as the apple of thy eye."—Prov. vii. 2. How severely is military discipline observed in an army! The necessity is still greater in our spiritual warfare.

But what need of reasonings, or of appealing to universal experience, to evince what the oracle of truth itself expressly declares in these words,—Eccl. xix. 1: He who contemns small things falls by degrees?" St. Austin compares venial sins to small venomous insects, which, though they do not kill by one bite, as the lion, yet by their multitudes are as effectually mortal in the end. —L. de 10 Cordis, c. 11. And in his twelfth tract on St. John, n. 14, p. 390, he writes thus: "Many little sins, if they are neglected, kill. The drops of water, which fill rivers, are small; grains of sand are also small; yet, if much sand be laid on a ship, it sinks it; and if water, entering by little, be not pumped out, it is no less sure to drown the vessel, than the greatest waves falling upon her. It matters not whether she perish all at once, by one great wave or by degrees, by springing a leak unperceived, or by water entering drop by drop through an imperceptible chink;

the wreck is neither less sure, nor less fatal. This doctrine is not to be understood, as if venial sins, ever so much multiplied, can amount to the guilt of mortal sin. What, then, is here meant is, that venial sin, if neglected, certainly leads to mortal, and even to the most dangerous state of mortal sin.

A neglect of venial sin disposes to mortal two ways, directly and indirectly. Directly; first, because it often happens, that a considerable matter in the same line will be mortal. In such cases it is evident, that an habit of smaller transgressions leads to greater; as if one be accustomed to use rash words, to commit little frauds, tell inconsiderable lies, be negligent a little in his devotions or other duties to God, or the like; if this be with attachment, or habitual and affected, it will by degrees carry him beyond the bounds of venial sin, because they, of their own nature, draw a soul farther and farther, and at the same time both blind her, and with a violence natural to all habits attract her. Secondly, the just bounds of mortal and venial sins are generally uncertain to us, and cannot be fixed by men, or determined by any human judgment or learning, as God has nowhere revealed them to us, whereas such a knowledge is noways necessary for us, seeing all sin is to be avoided with the utmost diligence. Hence St. Augustin, speaking of the distinction of mortal and venial sin, says,—L. 21. de Liv. c. 27: "It is a point most difficult to find, and most dangerous to determine."—"*Difficillimum est invenire, et periculosissimum definire.*" He adds: "I have made great search, but have not been able to find any certainty; and perhaps God has, on that very account, concealed them, lest our solicitude in avoiding all sin should grow remiss; because, if men knew such limits, their sloth might lie secure, whereas, the bounds of venial sin not being known, we have a great spur to be always fervent and watchful." St. Thomas also observes: "It is too dangerous for us to determine what is not mortal sin, unless the truth be evident in God's word."—Quodlib. 9, art. 15.

We must, thirdly, observe, that men ordinarily fall short of their resolutions. The very best do not perfectly reach their aim. How much more will the slothful, and they who propose to avoid only mortal sin, exceed these bounds.

Fourthly, such are always blinded by their passions, and consequently are, of all men, the least able to fix these bounds between mortal sin and venial sin. Custom, example, and false maxims of the world, make men often look on great crimes as small. Self-love, especially in the tepid, is still a greater bias,

strongly actuates the will, and disfigures the truth. Our sins, on this account, seem to us not great, because by self-love shutting our eyes, we flatter ourselves in our own deceit, says St. Gregory the Great, L. 1. in Ezech.

But though the object can only be a venial sin, it will be made mortal, if our hearts (whose dispositions we can never sound) are so bent on it, that we should commit it though it were mortal. The sovereign love of God is gradually weakened by venial sin, and at last will be extinguished in the heart, whilst an attachment to creatures, growing continually stronger, at last gains the ascendant, and becomes predominant in it. Thus every habitual venial sin disposes directly to mortal, as St. Thomas observes, several ways. The soul through it slides into the precipice, often without being conscious to herself of her fall; or, at last being led to the brink, abandoned by God, hurried on by the violence of impetuous passions, she knowingly takes the fatal step.

As for a design, in venial sin, of entering to the bounds of mortal, or a resolution of laying aside all solicitude of avoiding any sin which is not mortal; either of these dispositions is, in itself, an actual mortal sin, as it is an immediate occasion of it. "He who loves danger shall perish in it."

Venial sin always disposes to mortal sin indirectly, as it impairs charity daily more and more, makes graces more sparing and weaker, destroys fervour, roots up good dispositions, strengthens the passions, and opens the heart to receive the poison. And such a state of venial sin is the more desperate, as in it the strength of the soul has been gradually enervated, and she is reduced to it by an universal spiritual decay. Corporal distempers are much more dangerous and harder to be cured, when they proceed from a decay, and are the effect of long languor and waste; for powers, spirits, or organs, spent and exhausted, cannot be repaired again, whereas disorders from a plethora or redundancy are easily removed by evacuations. So it happens in the disorders of the soul. Hence St. Gregory the Great says, Pastor. Admon. 34: "Sometimes it is worse to sin in a small thing than in a greater." And St. Chrysostom, Hom. 8. in Matt.: "Sometimes small sins seem to me to require more care to be avoided than the more grievous; for these, of their own nature, stir up our attention against them, whereas the others are more easily despised." Nothing is destroyed all at once. A great fall proceeds from little things everywhere, but especially in a spiritual life. Whence St. Chrysostom says again,

Hom. 8. in 1 Cor.: "He who strays a little will go far very fast. A little is not little; it is all." Souls do not fall at once. The devil never proposes enormous sins at first. Their sight affrights, as they are monsters of horror, bringing with them the guilt of hell. He finds access more easily by venial sins, which, becoming habitual, lead to mortal insensibly. "He who is unfaithful in little is unfaithful also in much."—Luke, xvi. 10. For, as St. Augustin observes, Enchir. c. 78: "What sins are light, what grievous, is to be weighed by the judgment of God, not of men: for, who would have believed him guilty of hell-fire, who calls his brother fool, if truth in itself had not said it?" He moreover takes notice, that men judge under the blinds of false prejudices, of passions, and of the world, and its maxims and customs. Enchir. c. 80: "Sins ever so great and horrible, when once they are come into custom, are believed small, or sometimes none at all." The most common and lightest venial sins directly lead the soul to mortal, which are as seldom perceived or thought on, as the danger was. Thus talkativeness leads naturally to detraction, slander, and a hundred excesses, in which the malice may be mortal, yet entirely unperceived. Too great a familiarity, even of persons of the same sexes, leads into sensual fondnesses, or criminal flatteries, and condescensions: curiosity draws into dissipation, hardness of heart, and innumerable evils; a little vanity into open pride or ambition; and so on in all other habitual venial sins. On the contrary, he who fears an idle word will never fall into detraction, &c.—as he who is careful not to throw away a shilling superfluously is in no danger of squandering his estate.

## MEDITATION XI.

### ON VENIAL SINS OF SURPRISE.

1. The distinction between venial sins of malice and of surprise is very great.

2. No one is exempt from sin.

3. On the means by which daily venial sins are repaired.

1. Infinite is the difference between venial sins of malice, that is, those which are committed knowingly, and with a positive deliberate malice and full choice, and such sins of surprise, which men fall into through human frailty, for want of sufficient

compunction, from which even the saints are not totally exempt, who would not, for a thousand worlds, consent knowingly to the least offence against God. The latter are neither so grievous nor so pernicious. Hence the Holy Ghost says, not he who falls into small faults, but "he who despises small things, falls by degrees."—Eccl. xix. 8. For he, who neglects or contemns them, commits them with a perfect knowledge, and a deliberate malice, never rises from them, but lives in an habitual impenitence of them, so that his wounds are deep, permanent, and incurable, and multiplied one upon another. Such a disposition and state are most hateful to God, and most pernicious in their consequences. Upon which St. Bernard writes thus, L. de Præc. et Disp. c. 11: "The obstinacy of an impenitent heart makes even the least faults exceedingly grievous, and turns a small simple transgression into a crime of heinous rebellion." And St. Chrysostom, Hom. 8. in 1 Cor.: "Let us not neglect any sloth as small: for neglected, it will grow immense. A little rent in a garment, if neglected, will destroy the whole coat; and the house will fall, from a few stones failing, and not repaired." Have not I been guilty of this insensibility?

Venial sins of surprise and frailty are of a very different nature. They are such as the servants of God fall into, though they study daily to be more watchful against them, and labour, in a perpetual spirit of penance, to wash away their stains as soon as contracted. Such are light distractions in spiritual duties, through the inconstancy and weakness of human minds, anxiety in duties or affairs, too great levity in hearing others' faults, too great harshness, severity, or frowardness in zeal, precipitation, or a little sloth in actions, small unperceived motions of self-love, sensuality, vanity, self-will, or the like—secret passions, superfluous words, want of a sufficient guard over any of the senses, or any motives of the heart, &c. Any deliberate action, word, thought, or affection, which is not virtually referred to the holy will of God, and corresponds not with it, or is tainted with any such circumstance from self-love, is an offence against God. Simple imperfections, indeed, are not sins, but only a want of a greater perfection; yet they are frequently sinful on account of some sloth or other passion being the occasion of them. And it is impossible often for men to determine what is a venial sin, and what a mere imperfection; or to discern all the movements of their own heart, or what is their real principle.

In proportion as a soul advances in virtue, her light of grace

increases; and as it becomes purer, the more perfectly does she discover in herself the secret movements of depraved nature and self-love. She sees them in great numbers, like filthy serpents, full of poison creeping out of her heart, such as she could not have believed that she had harboured in her bosom. She abhors them and their cursed source, yet does not fret or disturb herself at the sight of her weakness and baseness, but only learns thence to humble herself more and more, to detest that source of pride, vanity, and self-love, still subsisting within her, and to labour courageously to extirpate it.

As the sun, from its rising, mounts higher and higher, displaying brighter beams, so her interior light, still growing continually greater, assists her in discerning and demolishing more perfectly the tower of self-love, on which all the batteries of all the passions are lodged, and which runs its foundations very deep in vitiated nature, is the object of our perpetual assaults, and can never be entirely destroyed during this mortal life. We must observe also, that the more perfect a soul is, the more grievous is the least sinful offence. The sin increases according to the degree of merits.—St. Isidore, L. 21. de Sum. Bono, c. 18. Whence St. Gregory shows, how enormous the least offence is in a priest, if he in anything desert wilfully the warfare of which he is a leader and head.

2. Both faith and reason teach us, that it is in our power to avoid every particular venial sin; otherwise the committing of it would not be a free action, nor consequently any fault, as St. Augustin says, L. 2. de Prec. in Prit. c. 8.

But it is an article of this same holy faith, that no one lives entirely exempt from venial sin, unless by an extraordinary succour of grace, as we believe of the Blessed Virgin, who, by a special privilege, was, as St. Augustin doubts not, L. de Nat. et Gr. c. 36,&c., preserved from all kind of sin; nor will the respect we owe to her divine Son suffer us to call this in question, says the same father; and in his words also the Council of Trent, Sess. 6, can. 22.

This is a point most clearly expressed in the holy Scriptures. "There is a man, who doeth not sin."—3 Kings, viii. 46. "We all offend in many things."—James, iii. 2. "The just man falls seven times a day," *i. e.*, often.—Prov. xxiv. 16. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."—1 John, i. 8. He says not, we have not humility, if we say that, but we deceive ourselves, and say what is false. This our blessed

Redeemer sufficiently teaches us in his divine prayer, in which all the just learn to pray continually for the forgiveness of their daily sins, which would not be true in every one's mouth, if every one did not often sin, as St. Augustin in many places, St. Cyprian, St. Ambrose, St. Gregory, St. Thomas, &c., observe.

The Semipelagian pride denied that the just fell into frequent venial sins. This heresy was condemned in the Council of Mileve, can. 7, and strenuously confuted by the great doctor of God's grace, St. Augustin, in his several books against those enemies of the necessity of Christ's grace. Also by S. Jerom, L. 2. *contra* Pelag., and L. 2. *contra* Jovinian., and all the subsequent Fathers and Councils. Whence even Cassian, though in another point too much leaning to the Semipelagian error, not then condemned, writes thus: "It is impossible for any of the saints not to incur some of those offences, which are committed by words, by thought, by ignorance, by forgetfulness, by a kind of necessity, by surprise, by sloth, or drowsiness." And St. Augustin in L. de Nat. and Gr. c. 36: "If, therefore, excepting the Virgin Mother of God, we could assemble together all the saints, whilst they lived here on earth, and ask them if they were without sin, all would cry out with one voice: If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." St. Gregory the Great, L. 4, Mor. c. 24, observes, that in the book of Job stars are said to be darkened with clouds, to signify that souls, even in the saints, drag certain remains of night in this life.

We have reason to adore and bless the mercy of God in bearing with us, so weak and sinful as we are, and in suffering us to live to serve him, at least in something, and to wash away our offences by continual tears and penance. We ought still more to praise his mercy in vouchsafing at last to call us, by death, from this life of sin, that we may cease to sin, and put off all our stains, being translated from this state of banishment and danger into the country of sanctity and pure love. Do not we sigh after that blessed region? Who will give me the wings of the dove, that I may fly speedily from this land of sin, danger, and vanity, and enjoy the true freedom of the blessed? In the meantime, continual watchfulness over myself, prayer, and penance, must be my arms and protection. How faithful ought I to be in the perfect and heroic practice of all these means of my preservation!

3. These venial sins of surprise, as they proceed not from

malice, but from a bare want of a continual, universal watchfulness, are easily blotted out in the just, who live in a perpetual spirit of penance, which these falls nourish in them, and which excite them daily to serve God more perfectly. But, if they are not thus speedily and carefully washed off, they multiply their wounds, and cause most dangerous consequences in the soul. They produce a subtraction of the operations of the Holy Ghost, and of his particular graces; impair charity, weaken its fervour, create a languor in the soul, a difficulty to be recollected, a coldness in prayer, and pave the way to still more pernicious remote effects. The least sore in the body, if neglected and left uncleansed, to corrupt with dirt and filth, with which it will be soon filled, will fester and become very painful, nay, at length, will mortify; and if still nothing be done to stop it, will, by a fatal gangrene, cause death. In like manner, the least venial sins, which would be easily wiped away by daily penance, will, by neglect, "overrun the whole soul with blotches, and an universal scab, so that she cannot come to the embraces of her heavenly spouse, at least without great confusion."—St. Aug. They will, moreover, putrefy, as it were, and come to such a pitch as at last to threaten her spiritual life, and taint and infect all her virtues and good works. The Holy Ghost compares them to flies, which spoil the sweetest ointment by putrefying it: "Flies dying in the oil corrupt its sweetness."—Eccles. x. 1.

The saints are most sensible of the pernicious consequences, and of the venom of this evil. Therefore, they labour with the utmost solicitude to preserve the greatest purity of soul, that nothing in it may offend the eyes of their jealous and holy God, alienate him any way from them, or deprive them of any of his choicest favours. By the least falls, they learn to be daily more watchful, and to have a more strict guard over themselves: thus they advance daily in greater purity of life and manners. To efface immediately all debts they may contract, and to speedily heal all the little wounds which they receive, they never cease weeping and labouring to satisfy for them, by earnest, humble prayer, a constant spirit of compunction, and all sorts of good works, performed with a contrite and humble heart. They, above all, repeat with all possible fervour that petition of our Lord's Prayer for this purpose: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us;" which they have frequently in the day in their hearts and mouths. Thus lamenting the sins which they discover in themselves, and also those

they do not see, knowing their hidden offences to be many, they say with St. Gregory Nazianzen, Carm. de Seipso: "I pour forth scalding tears; yet I add new sins; and, though I should have exhausted my tears by fresh sins, I still produce new sources of tears."

The principal work of satisfaction, by which these offences are to be expiated, are three: prayer, alms-deeds, and fasting, or all bodily mortifications. But care must be taken, that inward compunction, or a perfect spirit of penance, accompany them, and be their soul. "These sins," says Cæsarius, Hom. 8, "must be continually redeemed by perpetual prayers, frequent fasts, large alms, and the forgiveness of other offences against us." And St. Leo, Serm. 10. de Jejun. Mens.: "To heal the wounds which they frequently receive, who are engaged in this conflict with our spiritual enemy, the salve of three medicines is chiefly to be employed, fervent prayer, the mortification of fasting, and charity, by plentiful alms." St. Augustin, Ep. ad Seleuc., calls our Lord's Prayer, in particular, the daily penance of the good Christians. He also says, Hom. ult. Inter. 50:—"Our lesser sins separate us from the embraces of our spouse, unless they are cut off by daily penance. To blot out which, we every day strike our breasts, and acknowledge ourselves sinners."

The sacraments of penance and the blessed Eucharist, and the sacrifice of the Mass, which is offered for the remission of sins, are the most powerful remedies of venial sin. That of penance was expressly instituted by Christ, for the remission of all sin, and nothing can contribute more to purify our souls than the devout use of it. It is particularly suitable before the holy communion, which requires the greatest purity from all stain that is possible. The sacrament of the blessed Eucharist is the restorer of our impaired spiritual strength, and "the antidote by which we are delivered from our daily faults, and preserved from mortal sins," as the Council of Trent explains its effects.—Sess. 13, c. 2. Whence St. Ambrose says, L. 2. de Sacr. c. 6:—"I, who am always sick, ought always to take my physic." On the Mass, he observes in the same place:—"If, as often as the blood of Christ is poured forth, it is spilt for the remission of sins, that my sins may be always forgiven me, I, who sin always, ought always to use the remedy." This holy sacrifice is, then, to be assisted at in the most perfect spirit of penance, as it is the great means of satisfaction and propitiation.

Praying in holy places, striking our breasts, benedictions of the

Church, and the devout use of holy water, contribute to blot out venial sins, through the public prayers and blessings of the Church, but only if they are accompanied with the inward true spirit of compunction and penance. Therefore, when we take the holy water, for example, we must be very solicitous that we do it with these sincere sentiments and affections, praying in our hearts: "Sprinkle me, O Lord, with hyssop, not dipped in the blood of sacrifices or goats, the weak offerings of the old law, but in the blood of the immaculate Lamb, the true propitiation of our offences; may it cleanse perfectly my soul, and it will be pure in thy holy eyes." For prayer and all these other means have no power or effect, but through the blood of Christ, the only source of grace and propitiation.

Besides watching over ourselves, we may imitate St. Charles Borromeo, who begged his director, and also a faithful director, to daily advertise him of the least faults he should observe in him. This vigilance and fear can alone discover and remove the beginnings of our evils, which otherwise, like imperceptible vapours rising out of the earth, soon form great clouds. The maxim usually given for the preservation of bodily health: "Oppose the beginnings," is still more necessary for our salvation.

We must, by self-examination, discover our most secret faults; must pierce into the most inward recesses of the mind, strip off every disguise, lay open the inward part, make a strict scrutiny into the very soul and spirit, and critically judge of the thoughts and intents of the heart.—James, i. 23. This we must do with an impartial severity, sensible how apt our heart is to deceive us, and how treacherous and deceitful it is. Its wiles and doublings are so hidden and intricate, that it requires the nicest care and most steady attention to detect and unfold them.

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## MEDITATION XII.

### ON HABITUAL SIN.

A CRIMINAL habit not broken aggravates the malice of every sin committed by it, and requires immediate repentance.

It is very difficult to be overcome.

It is easily formed, and increases its strength by the quickest, though most imperceptible progress.

1. An habit is a facility or propensity produced by repeated acts. For example: a man, by often swearing, acquires an unhappy proneness to that vice. Such a propensity may, indeed, be sometimes created by one act, if it be a very intense one.

Divines teach, with St. Thomas of Aquin, that sin is more grievous by the circumstance of its being a sin of habit. First, because the will adheres to it, and embraces it with far greater eagerness, vehemence, and obstinacy, than in sins of frailty and surprise. The choice is also more deliberate, at least in the cause, which is the habit.

Secondly, the habit is a most lasting and fixed resolution of preferring the offence and enmity of God to his service, which is also increased by every act produced by the habit: as, on the contrary, a vow or constant resolution of any perpetual virtuous practice adds to the very act, the merit and value of such a perpetual sacrifice. On these accounts, St. Thomas teaches, that sins of habit are sins of mere malice, and the most voluntary of all others. But this is to be understood of a habit still subsisting entire; for, after the will has sincerely broken it, and labours to root it out, if it should yet be carried by its violence into some sin, this will be deemed no longer an act of malice, but of family.

Thirdly, we must add, that every habit is, by its own nature, an immediate occasion of sin, and an interior one which cannot be avoided by flight; consequently, it is the worst of all occasions. As, then, for a man voluntarily to expose himself to an immediate occasion of mortal sin is always a mortal sin, it must be such wilfully to create or fortify any vicious habit, the most dangerous of all occasions, and such a one as the man must always carry about with him, and in his own bosom. Hence, the circumstance of a habit in a mortal sin is to be declared in confession. Which, indeed, it ought to be, were it only to make known the true state of the penitent's soul, in order to receive proper advice and a suitable penance, though often this circumstance will be sufficiently known from the confession itself. This proposition is condemned by Pope Innocent XI. n. 58: "We are not bound to confess the custom of any sin to the confessor who asks it."

Yet sinners sometimes allege the violence of their attachment to their passions, and the difficulty they find in overcoming their vicious habits, as an excuse of their crimes and delays of repen-

tance. This is certainly the height of impiety and of obstinacy in evil. For, to call the victory over their passions impossible is, on one side, tacitly to accuse God, as if he granted not sufficient graces, though all the time he stands at the door of their hearts, and knocks there, offering all necessary succours. If they receive these sparingly, the cause is in wilful obstacles; let them but remove these, and they will receive more abundant helps. Can a man, who wilfully shuts his eyes at bright noon-day, accuse the sun, as if it did not give light? On the other side, they make that a pretext for their impiety, which severely condemns it. For, did not their own wilful malice first create, and is it not that which still continues to fortify their habits? They themselves are the authors of all their strength. Their tyranny, indeed, is now very great. But this motive, again, ought to engage them to resist without delay, and no longer increase for one moment such dire misfortunes.

Some say, they have often entered upon this work, but have always fallen back again, and now look upon it almost with despair, unless some lucky accident weaken their chains. But those miscarriages happened, because the resolutions were too faint, only half-wills. A thorough and perfect resolution breaks all obstacles at once; they would almost vanish and disappear before it. It is often our cowardice that exaggerates, or even creates, out of phantoms, the difficulties of conversion. "It is not," says the heathen philosopher Seneca, Ep. 104, "because things are difficult, that we dare not aim at them; but they appear difficult, because we have not courage." In habits the difficulties are strong indeed; but if we begin in earnest, and form a perfect resolution, they, though ever so real, will be already half vanquished. Nothing is so hard to be done, which serious application does not master. Experience shows how incredibly persons find themselves advanced by it, insensibly and before they are aware, in what before they thought impossible. Even the effectual will, once thoroughly formed, with an entire courage and unshaken purpose, goes the greater part of the way, as a heathen poet justly observed:

> "Who sets about, hath half perform'd the deed.
> Dare to be wise, and if you would succeed,
> Begin."*

* Dimidium facti qui bene cœpit habet;
Sapere aude,————
Incipi.—Horat. l. 1, ep. 2, v. 40.

If the severity of the conflict dismays any one, let him not look too long before him at once, lest he may be dejected. Let him make his resolutions first for one day or week, and when that is over for another. Such a prospect will not seem so affrighting or impossible; yet he will by that means, in a short time, find his obstacles overcome. An ancient solitary said to himself in the morning, that he would fast till noon; then, that he would prolong it till night, and so on till he had brought himself to imitate the greatest fasters in the desert. Let the sinner consider the examples of St. Mary Magdalen, St. Augustin, and of innumerable souls who have happily broken far stronger habits, and encourage himself, saying to his soul: Canst not thou do what those have done, so many weak and tender men and women, so many labouring under greater difficulties? The difficulty is to form an effectual resolution, determined to use all violences, and break through all obstacles.

Every one must be encouraged in this conflict, if he consider that the difficulties will daily grow lighter, and at length be even changed into delights. He will then joyfully repeat to himself: "Because I have laboured a little, I have found to myself much repose."—Eccl. iii. 35. This the Holy Ghost assures him: "In its work thou shalt labour a little, and shall soon eat of its fruits." —Eccl. vi. 20. And again: "I will lead thee through the paths of justice, which, when thou shalt have entered, thy steps shall not be straitened, and running, thou shalt meet no stumbling-block."—Prov. vi. 11. Oh, how agreeable will the sweets of liberty and virtue seem to such a soul! What a pleasure will it be to be delivered from the slavery of her habits, and to see her chains broken!

"At first, a thing seems to thee insupportable; in process of time, by custom, thou wilt judge it not so hard; soon after, thou wilt not feel it; and then shortly it will even delight thee," says St. Bernard, l. 1. de Consid., and before him St. John Climacus, Gr. l. n. 18. This St. Cyprian witnesses by his own experience, ad Donat.: "I formerly said to myself," says he, "how is so great a change possible? But after a second birth in Christ had made me a new man, my troubles all vanished in a wonderful manner. What had seemed difficult was easy; what was thought impossible I saw then to be feasible." And St. Augustin, who, before his conversion, had thought he could never live without these or those pleasures, soon after said with jubilation of heart: "How sweet was it immediately to me to be

without the enchanting charms of those follies! What I once feared to lose, it was my joy to be freed from." 1. 8. Confess. c. 3.

Certain unthinking sinners say they will convert themselves hereafter. Alas! who ever designedly gave time to an enemy to strengthen himself by reinforcements? Who, finding a burthen too heavy, would wait till it should be doubled? Trees are not to be pulled up after they have taken deep root; and experience shows the truth of that divine oracle: "The young man, according to his way, even when he is grown old, will not depart from it."—Prov. xxii. 6. "He shall be filled with vices as his bones are with marrow. These will never forsake him, but will sleep with him in the dust and in hell."—Job, xx. 12.

They will repent hereafter; but they do not reflect that God is daily, in punishment of their resistance, withdrawing himself farther from them. Sampson had often broken his cords and revenged himself on the Philistines; seeing himself again bound by them, he said, yet laughing in himself: "I will go forth as before, and shaking myself break my bonds, and revenge myself on my enemies."—Judg. vi. 20. But alas! he said this, little then knowing that God had forsaken him. In like manner, the habitual sinner will find his presumption justly punished, and himself abandoned under the tyranny of his passions. Again, his habit gaining ground in the meanwhile will bind him much harder, and will change the state of his soul much for the worse. All the divine seeds, the gifts of nature, the benefits of grace, the sentiments of religion, will soon be corrupted in her lying by, and, as it were, rotting in her disorders. A spiritual blindness will spread itself over her understanding. God will forsake her, and even watch to make her abuse of his long forbearance the object of his justice. He will revenge his own cause, and with his own hand conduct her punishment. "Mine is vengeance—that their foot may slip," says he, Deut. xxxii. 55. He will pronounce this sentence upon her: "He that is in filth, let him be filthy still."—Apoc. xxii. 11.

2. The tyranny of a vicious habit ought to move us to dread and shun its dangers, or, without delay, to root it out, if it be already our misfortune to have contracted it. A habit, whether good or evil, is of wonderful force, and draws a soul with a violence quite incredible to those who have never experienced it. One who has formed long habits of virtue cannot suddenly lose them. This is still more true in vicious habits, especially in carnal sins, such as impurity and drunkenness. To this many

things concur. The organs of the body, by frequent use, acquire such a disposition to those acts, as to run into them of themselves, and sometimes without reflection, as we see in habitual swearers. Nothing but extreme watchfulness and perfect violence can stop them. These reiterated acts also imprint in the soul a certain imperious quality, which drags her by a kind of necessity, and which is called a sort of second nature. Every act makes this deeper and stronger, driving in, as it were, a new nail. The poor soul is enslaved and chained by it, scarcely remaining mistress of her own will: or, to speak more properly, her will is to become her chain, and is so captivated that it is with the greatest difficulty she can disengage herself. She is bound fast down, not by any outward chain, but by her own iron will, as St. Augustin expresses it from his own woful experience: "*Suspirabam ligatus non ferro alieno, sed mea ferrea voluntate.*"—Conf. l. 8. The poor will is so absolutely possessed, as to be reduced to a perfect slavery under the tyranny of this habit, and to have almost lost the command of itself.

Moreover, a habit of sin destroys the three barriers, which God had set on our souls, to defend us from sin, viz., shame of evil, fear of God, and dread of punishment. Any of these often stops the sinner, and preserves him from committing the evil which his passions suggest. But a criminal habit breaks them all down, hurries on the soul like a torrent, and blinds her to all other considerations, except only that of its infamous object. God has taken away her force, and abandoned her to pillage.—Isaiah, v.

Add, that habit produces such a blindness in the understanding, and such a hardness of heart, that God's terrible threats, the frightful scenes of judgment, and a miserable eternity, examples or other visitations of God, make but small impressions on the sinner, and the most pathetic exhortations touch him not. "The impious man, when he is come into the depth, contemns."—Prov. xviii. 3. Only a miracle of grace can convert him. He will often deplore his misery, and make faint resolutions; but a firm, effectual will to convert himself costs tears of blood.

St. Augustin observes, Tr. 49. in Joan., that in the three persons raised corporally from the dead by our Saviour, the three states of sinners are figured. The soul fallen into sin by surprise, by the daughter of the prince of the synagogue. Christ only said to her: "Rise, daughter," and she rose alive. The soul fallen with full deliberation, by the widow of Naim's son.—Luke, ix. 14.

Christ touched the coffin to raise him. Lazarus, who had been four days in his grave, and began already to putrefy, figures sinners buried in habit. To restore him to life, it cost Jesus many tears. He prayed as for something extraordinary; he was troubled, he wept, and cried out with a loud voice: "Lazarus, come forth."—John, xi. 45. To raise him was the most difficult miracle. His hands and feet were tied, his body wrapped in a shroud, bound with bands, and laid under a large stone. Such is the state of a sinner, plunged in a vicious habit. Many engagements of his affections bind him, many strong impediments fold him, and a heavy load holds him down. "How difficultly does he rise, when the weight of custom oppresses," cries out St. Augustin. The reasons hereof are plain, from the incontestible principles already laid down. For the habitual sinner is buried in the stench of his crimes; a heavy load is laid upon him, and "he is bound by the chains of his sins."—Prov.

O sinners, "this very day, if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts."—Ps. xciv. 8. Open your hearts to God's grace, and your ears to his gracious calls. The son of God approaches you, and cries out with a loud voice: "Lazarus, come forth." Sinner, awake, arise from your iniquity, come out of this sepulchre of death. He is able still to restore you to life. He would not continue to call you, if he did not earnestly desire your conversion. You have your voice left; cry out, then, to him most earnestly from the depth of your miseries; though they are extreme, he will most certainly deliver you. Let the difficulties be ever so great, a firm resolution, with his grace, will remove them; and though your deliverance were to cost ever so much, it would still be indispensable; and eternity deserves far more. A delay in this great work is sure, in the ordinary course of providence, to lose all, and that irretrievably.

3. However dreadful and tyrannical evil habits are, they are easily formed, and thus grow violent imperceptibly. Their imperious tyranny and terrible consequences no ways declare themselves in the beginning. The first steps do not, in appearance, lead so far, nor do their effects seem so fatal. And one is a step to another, in such a manner, that a soul falls into the next still more easily, and is a slave while she yet imagines herself free, and is fast chained before she sees or thinks of any such thing. A single thread is weak, but many wreaths twisted together make a cord too strong to be broken. A plant pushes continually, but so insensibly, that to those who see it every day

there appears no change in it from one day to the next; yet it mounts apace, and in a short time acquires its full growth, and this from a root hidden in the earth, and not to be perceived. In like manner, do habits form themselves, and acquire the greatest strength before their rise or increase is perceived. The man is not himself aware of it, till he thinks of disengaging himself: he only finds how fast he is bound, when he attempts to break his cords. Then he is surprised to see the extreme violence which he suffers, *e. g.*, in the separation from a person, for whom before he only perceived in himself what he thought an affection of a just esteem, or in the renouncing a certain place or action. He says, I could not have believed my soul had been thus captivated: I never before this moment felt the disposition of my heart. It is not that the engagement had not the same force before, but he had not perceived those chains which delighted him: for our heart goes farther than we design, and without thinking of it, or observing its motions.

The most tyrannical habit in the beginning was but a small spark, from which no one could foresee such terrible consequences; but the fire gained by degrees, and became a devouring flame, which baffled all endeavours, and was not now to be resisted without violent means. Ah! men see not whither this liberty, this company, this affection, this secret pride or envy will carry them. But habits are formed, and acquire strength very fast; and the extremities of fury, extravagance, blindness, and madness, to which they at length blindly hurry men, are astonishing. In virtues, indeed, they meet with contradictions and obstacles from the opposition of concupiscence and the passions. But, by a contrary rule, vice finds, in the corruption of concupiscence, only attraction and nourishment. The inclinations of nature, depraved by sin, tending of their own accord to delight in it, and the senses being flattered and charmed by it, give to a wicked habit the greatest progress. Thus a man rolling down a steep hill, or falling into a rapid torrent, is carried as swiftly as the declivity is steep, or the stream more impetuous. Habits of virtue rise up, as it were, against the stream; but vice glides down with the current. Virtue has the basis of the passions against it, and must master them before it can reign in our hearts; but vice follows them. Virtue is planted in our heart as in a soil, which, through the corruption of sin, has become foreign to it, and in which it cannot grow, unless it be cultivated with great care, attention, and labour, and continually nourished and watered with

divine grace: but vice is a weed of the proper growth of this soil.

> He that once sins, like him that slides on ice,
> Goes swiftly down the slippery ways of vice:
> Tho' conscience checks him, yet, those rubs gone o'er,
> He slides on smoothly, and looks back no more.
>
> JUVENAL, Sat. 13.

The first sin is single, but, unless speedily blotted out by a sincere repentance, makes a second more easy. By two or three falls, a custom, together with a habit or proneness, is produced: this custom, not resisted, becomes a second nature, as St. Augustin says. The first acts begin a chain, which binds the soul and clogs her will with fetters; every sin is a new link, as it were, and locks her firmer and closer. In this state she is a slave. She, indeed, often says, that she will arise and free herself: she makes often resolutions for this purpose; but as often does the weight of her habit draw her back, and passion still triumphs. Hence proceed delays, trouble, agitations, conflicts, waves of contrary thoughts, driving her backwards and forwards. She wills and wills not: desires to be disengaged, yet fears to be so; and goes on always dragging her chains, both hating, and yet delighted with her slavery. She heaps crime upon crime, and engages herself, as it were, laughing in a necessity of sinning and of damnation. This expression is not too strong. For habit is a kind of violence, which captivates the will. *Velle meum tenebat inimicus.*—St. Augustin's Confess. The Holy Ghost compares the power, which such a soul has of converting herself, to that of a blackmoor to change the colour of his skin, or a leopard his motley spots; —Jer. xiii. 35;—things naturally impossible. Not that these comparisons are perfectly adequate; but that they show the great difficulty of the conversion of the habitual sinner.

My soul, as sinful habits may be so easily contracted, and yet are so imperious, and so fatal, watch attentively over all thy inclinations, thoughts, and actions, and spare nothing to preserve thyself from this dreadful enemy, which, if once admitted, can never be expelled without the severest martyrdom, and conflicts, and tears even of blood; or what is more to be feared, will never be overcome at all, but carrying thee, reeking from thy sins, into the eternal pit. If it be already thy misfortune to groan under this evil, free thyself without delay; be not discouraged at resistance. It is impossible to die to sin without much sadness, sorrow, pain, and contradiction to corrupt nature, which is in love with

its own chains and evil habits. But victory will soon turn this into happy freedom and joy. The devil, perceiving thy desire to rise, will employ all his malice to stifle it, by suggestions of despair; but confidence in God will easily defeat him.

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## MEDITATION XIII.

### ON THE SIN OF RELAPSE.

A SIN of relapse is most enormous. The obstacles to its removal are, in a particular manner, very great. The ordinary resources of conversion lose their force by it.

1. To relapse into sin is to return to it, after having renounced it by repentance. This may be either with or without a custom or habit of sin; for a custom implies a frequency of the acts, which may be when no repentance has preceded; and a habit adds a propensity to sin, arising from repeated actions. A sin of relapse carries along with it a particular enormity. Its malice is aggravated by three circumstances, which accompany it, viz., a notorious contempt of God, a special perfidiousness, and ingratitude. A contempt of the divine Majesty is a general circumstance found in all sin; but a relapse contains a particular and remarkable kind of contempt; by it a sinner undoes again what he had so solemnly done for God. He had destroyed in his soul the works of the devil, banished him out of his heart, restored it to God, who had again taken possession of it, re-established in it the kingdom of his grace, sanctified and honoured it again with his gifts, and with his most holy presence, and made it his throne on earth. The relapsing sinner overturns all this great work, and makes use of so extraordinary a mercy to God, only to insult him the more outrageously. If a king had not only pardoned a base traitor, but restored him to all his forfeited titles and honours, and to the highest posts and dignities of his empire, would he not think himself most grievously injured, and his majesty trampled upon, if that wretch should return again to his villainous practices against his person and crown? Would not this be a part so wicked and base, that it seems scarcely possible that any man could be so abandonedly profligate, and lost to all sentiments, as to be capable of it? This, however, is the treatment which the sovereign God of heaven and earth receives from the relapsing sinner, who, with

the most contemptuous baseness, tramples upon and destroys in himself his most precious gifts, and by them insults his bounty. "If I rebuild what I have destroyed, I make myself a prevaricator," that is remarkably so, says the Apostle. Gal. ii. 18.

The sinner does this with the most perfect knowledge of what he is doing. He has tasted, and has had experience of the service of Christ, and compared the sweetness and glory of his holy yoke with the baseness and slavery of sin. It is after the trial and knowledge of both sides, that he pronounces sentence in favour of sin, and gives the preference to the devil; after having, by penance, says Tertullian, 1. de Pœnit. c. 7, renounced God's enemy the devil.

He causes him again to triumph over God, and makes himself his prey; that he, having recovered his soul, may exult against the Lord. Though it cannot be spoken without trembling, nor thought of without horror, does he not formally prefer Satan to God? For he seems to have made a comparison, after knowing both, and, by an absolute sentence, pronounced him the better master, whose servant he, after all, chooses rather to be; as he before did penance to God for his sins, so now he makes atonement to the devil for that holy penance, by an execrable repentance of it, and hereby makes himself so much the more detestable to God, as he becomes more pleasing to the devil. Though this is not done by an express thought of such a formed judgment in the mind, which would be the most terrible blasphemy; yet it is done in fact, which is still the most terrible contempt, and such as cannot be thought of. Nor can the sinner here allege any excuse of ignorance or surprise, as he was perfectly instructed, on one side, in all that regards the inestimable value of God's grace; and, on the other, in the nature of the offence, and in the danger of the occasions that lead to it.

The enormity of a relapse is aggravated also by a signal perfidiousness which it involves. The sinner, when he repents, promises to God in the most solemn manner to renounce sin for ever, and passes this his engagement in the most sacred contract with him. Men are jealous of their word when given to a fellow-creature, and there is nothing they abhor more than the character of a perfidious wretch; and certainly nothing is more inviolable than a fidelity to engagements, which is the bond, nay the soul and essence, of public faith, and without which no contracts, commerce, or society amongst men could subsist. But the relapsing sinner is guilty of the greatest violation of it that can be

possible. He breaks his word, which he had given to God, first, in his solemn baptismal vows, and which he renews as often at least as he frequents the sacraments. So often then was a sacred contract passed between him and God, the condition of which was, on his side, this engagement, without which Almighty God would have never admitted him to pardon and his highest graces; for it was on condition that he reciprocally bound himself unto him, that he enriched and honoured him, and engaged himself always to treat him as his son. This infidelity is, then, the basest breach of faith, of faith given to God, and this in the most solemn manner, in the holy place, in the face of the altars, all the blessed spirits of heaven being witnesses and depositories thereof; in a contract and alliance sealed by all that is most holy and terrible; confirmed by the blood of the Lamb of God, the immaculate Lamb, and by the most sacred ceremonies; vowed in the hands of God's ministers, who received them in his name. By an unparalleled treachery, this contract is broken; these holy engagements are trampled upon by a base creature, whilst God remains most faithful on his side, and the eternal allegiance and fidelity sworn to him, in the face of heaven and earth, violated, even whilst he is still showering down his favours on the transgressor. The altars, the walls, the ministers who received these engagements in the person of Christ himself, all the heavenly spirits, who were witnesses of the penitent's tears and protestations, will rise up in judgment against him, and condemn him from the words of his own mouth. "The stone from the wall will cry out."—Hab. ii. 11.

Nothing can be a greater baseness than that which this unfaithful soul is guilty of. How contemptible art thou made, reiterating thy first ways, which thou hadst, in so sacred and solemn a manner, renounced and foresworn! "*Quam vilis facta es nimis, iterans vias tuas.*"—Jer. ii. 36. "That of the true proverb has happened to them: The dog has returned to his vomit; and the sow, that was washed, to her wallowing."—Pet. ii. 2.

To be a child, and never to know one's own mind, in things of the greatest importance, is the highest degree of baseness.

Ingratitude likewise aggravates a relapse above other sins. Gratitude is an essential obligation of a creature, and an homage, of which the Creator shows himself exceedingly jealous. And the greater any benefit is, the blacker must be the ingratitude with regard to it. Now no mercy can be greater, or granted to

one more unworthy, than the pardon of sin. The soul was a member of the devil, a monster of iniquity, loaded with curses and anathemas, which were to have been eternal. She is, by God's unspeakable mercy, delivered from these dreadful miseries, made his child, heiress of his kingdom, and enriched with his graces, honours, and privileges. This inestimable benefit, yet subsisting in all its lustre and all its advantages, is not only forgotten, but trampled upon. The Holy Ghost, with his graces, is contemptuously banished the heart, and his seat sacrilegiously made the throne of Satan, who is introduced in his room. What would be our just indignation against a villainous traitor, who, after being pardoned by his prince, should again rebel and bereave him of his crown and life, as the base Egfrid is said by some to have done against the merciful King Edmund Ironside? though, except that monster, there is not, perhaps, another example of such an ingratitude to be found. Yet this is nothing to the unparalleled ingratitude of the relapsing sinner.

This ingratitude is the greater, as the sins formerly forgiven were more grievous and more numerous, and as the relapse is in itself more heinous. Though the sins before pardoned are not revived again by a relapse;—as Pope Gelasius, 1. Dist. 4. de Pœnit. c. 24; St. Prosper, ad Cap. Gall. b. 198; St. Thomas, St. Bonaventure, and others prove;—yet, as all agree with St. Thomas, 3 p. q. 88, a. 1, 2, and 3, they return equivalently, on account of the special ingratitude of the relapsing sinner; but in a certain proportion known only to God, according to the enormity of the relapse. Whence St. Gregory the Great, in his Morals, quoted by St. Thomas, says: "As good works, which die by sin, revive by repentance; so also evil works, which are blotted out by repentance, by a relapse revive to punishment."

"O man, sin not after pardon; be not wounded after a cure; be not again defiled after grace. A fault, after forgiveness, is more grievous; a wound, after being once healed, is worse; it is base to return to the mire after being cleansed. He is ungrateful to the pardon, unworthy of heaven, and deserves not to be cleansed."—St. Chrys. Hom. de Lapsu primi. Hom.

2. A true conversion becomes much more difficult after a relapse. Our blessed Saviour says, that when the unclean spirit enters a man, from whom he had been before expelled, "he taketh away with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and entering in they dwell there."—Luke, xi. 26. If this be true of one relapse, what must we think of repeated ones multiplied upon

each other? The obstacles to a sincere conversion become much greater to such a one, than they are to other sinners. The devil re-enters him with his forces redoubled, holds him now in a much stronger captivity, and seems to possess him in peace. The sinner, on the other side, is made weaker as he is farther removed from God; his passions gain strength, and by his relapses form themselves into imperious habits, not to be easily broken. He could have easily destroyed the serpent, whilst it was little: the fiercest lions are easily crushed whilst very young; but, when grown up, will make the most valiant man, without arms, to tremble. Little rivulets are easily turned off near their spring, but surpass our art when swollen into great rivers.

These habits of sin are usually accompanied with habits of the most sacrilegious abuses of the sacraments and other means of grace, and always with a great spiritual blindness and insensibility. The sinner is lulled asleep under his dangers, and neither sees nor feels his miseries. He is at ease for the past, having often confessed all, though his false reconciliations only blinded him, and added new wounds, harder to be healed than the first.

Inconstancy itself grows into a habit, and the most pernicious of habits. The sinner is accustomed to find both the service of God and the slavery of the devil tiresome in their turns, and to endeavour often to change sides. Hence, when glutted and wearied with sin, he seeks to return to God; but doing this only by halves, he soon relapses into his sins, which he never perfectly renounced. He is like a man sick of some lingering, incurable, dry tympany, or some other such distemper, which affords intervals of an apparent recovery; but, as the bowels are already rotten and pierced in many places, the distemper soon shows itself again, and the wind, pent up and dilated, makes greater ravages within him than ever until the next evacuation and respite, at which the deluded patient is again big with the flattering confidence of an imaginary health. Just such is the case of the inconstant penitent, or habitually relapsing sinner. In his fits of repentance, the devil is no ways alarmed at the projects of conversion which he then forms, and the imperfect efforts he makes: he knows these will go no farther than before, and that he lifts up his hand, indeed, but will not dare effectually to give the stroke, and that the circle of repentance and sin will still run in the same way, and the old alternative still take its course. The subtle enemy, therefore, gives him little disturbance, as one whom he holds in peace; only he helps him to shut his eyes to his miseries, and fondly to deceive himself in his pretended conversion.

This inconstancy is not only a tyrannical habit and slavery, hard to be shaken off, but it also causes the greatest obstacles to the corresponding with grace, engendering in the soul an inveterate lethargy and stupidity, which nothing can stir or move, and which is incapable of any settled, firm dispositions. Hence our Saviour says of such: "No man setting his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."—Luke, ix. 62. He does not say, "is excluded from it," but, what expresses much more, is not fit, *i. e.*, has qualities and dispositions incompatible with a vocation to it. Let him then speedily shake off and renounce sin once for all, and in good earnest.

3. If a relapse, on one hand, increases the obstacles of a sincere conversion, on the other it weakens exceedingly the ordinary means and resources thereof, and makes them often unprofitable, and, by their abuse, pernicious. St. Paul considered this, when he said: "It is impossible (*i. e.*, very hard) for these who were once illuminated, having tasted also the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost; have moreover tasted the word of God, and the powers of the world to come; and are fallen away, to be renewed again to penance, crucifying to themselves the Son of God, and making him a mockery."—Heb. vi. 4. One first converted from sin is struck at the new light of grace, and moved with shame and grief to have offended God, and renounced his reason. But this resource loses a great deal of its force, and is generally unprofitable to the inconstant sinner. He has often experienced the lights of grace, and now takes little notice of them. *Who were once illuminated.* The first time the Jews in the desert saw the pillar of light over their camp, they were surprised and moved, so as to fear the punishment of their disobedience; but, after they had been accustomed to that sign of heaven, they frequently murmured and rebelled: the pillar still appeared, but made little impression on their minds; by custom they were become insensible to it.

Not only the supernatural lights of the understanding by grace, but also the inspirations of the will, become often unprofitable to such persons. These likewise they have tried, and now little regard them. "They have tasted the heavenly gift." What can inspiration now offer them, that they have not often contemned? Will the strongest charms of grace prevail over a heart long accustomed to receive its motions in vain? The same we may say of the word of God, pious books, sacraments, and the other means of grace. "They have tasted of the word of God, and of

the powers of the world to come." Long abuse had engaged the soul in a habit of contemning them. What, then, must the unhappy soul do? Is she to be abandoned to despair? Are these means to be laid aside? God forbid. But these dispositions of the heart are to be vigorously removed, and a more serious use made of them. Till then there is no appearance that they will be more effectual than hitherto. "Thy wound is incurable; thy bruise desperate: remedies have no power of profiting thee." *Insanabilis, est fractura tua, pessima plaga tua—curationum utilitas non est tibi.*"—Jer. xxx. 12, 13.

"God usually withdraws his most powerful graces, and abandons such relapsing sinners. Witness the impious King Sedecias, one day listening to the prophet, another day casting him into dungeons or lions' dens. Witness the Jews, after frequent relapses, forsaken by God in the most dreadful manner. An abuse of grace justly draws on a subtraction of it. "The earth, that drinketh in the rain which often comes upon it, but bringeth forth thorns and briars, is reprobate, and very near to a curse, whose end is to be burnt."—Heb. vi. 8. God's patience is wearied out: he has borne with this sinner these several relapses, but at last casts him off. "On the three crimes of Damascus, and on the fourth I will not convert him."—Amos, i. 3.* My soul, if thou hast recovered God's grace by his unspeakable mercy, be ever most solicitous, watchful, and fearful, lest thou again forfeit it. A relapse would be most dangerous and most enormous. "It had been better for them never to have known the way of justice, than, after they have known it, to turn back from that holy commandment, which was delivered to them."—2 Pet. ii. 21. Praise the goodness of God in bearing thy past relapses, and never cease to deplore them with continual tears of repentance and bitter sorrow.

* The author of the Commentary on the Relapse, under the name of St. Ambrose, c. 4, s. 3, p. 834, ed. vet., compares the habitual relapsing sinner to a man lying in the mire, who should beg of another to draw him out; yet as often as he would stretch out his hand to free him, the cowardly wretch should pull his arm, and plunge himself deeper under his mud. Would not the other, at last, wearied and angry to be so often deluded, go away, and leave him in his sink? Do not those act in the same manner with God, who often pray him to deliver them from their vices, yet embrace them so close as to refuse to be effectually separated from them? Will not he, to punish their contempt of his Majesty, at last forsake them?

## MEDITATION XIV.

### REPENTANCE IN CONSTANT RELAPSING SINNERS USUALLY FALSE.

This appears from the nature of the grace of reconciliation.

2. And from the nature of firm, sincere will.

3. It is confirmed from the practice and doctrine of the pastors and doctors of the Church from their earliest ages.

1. The misfortune of relapses is common among Christians. The Church's tribunal is always thronged with penitents. At least at Easter, even the most abandoned, habitual sinners never fail to pretend that they sincerely repent, and will begin a new life. Yet a few days, as if it were for decency and fashion's sake, are no sooner over, than most of them are the same they were before. Those who the last year were drunkards, this year return to the taverns, frequent old occasions, and fall into the excesses they pretended so solemnly to abjure for ever. Habitual swearers, after a short time of restraint, continue their ancient course as if it had never been interrupted, are as subject to passion and other occasions of their criminal course of life as before, and renew their sins. Those who are subject to choler, make their families and neighbourhood witness, that their repentance was but a short respite, not an entire renunciation of their sallies and transports. In short, though the churches are filled with the sighs of penitents, the world seems much the same: little or no alteration appears in its manners: its taverns are equally full of revelling and drunkenness; its streets still ring with execrable oaths grating our ears; its stage, the bane of innocence, continues to be crowded, without any apprehension of evil or danger; and sin seems to reign as much as ever. Ah! could this be, were men's repentance sincere, as it is pretended? May we not say of such sinners' penitence what St. Gregory said of Judas's, that it was worse than his fall? It only adds a new crime, and lulls them into a state of insensibility under the greatest evils. It is of such false repentance that St. Chrysostom says,—Hom. 3. in 2 Cor.: "The devil leads some by sin, others by penance, into damnation."

Such persons as live in an habitual vicissitude of penance and sin, of rising and falling, can never have been true penitents. The sacraments, which they receive in that state of inconstancy, can be no better than sacrileges and hypocrisy, how much soever they may flatter themselves upon their pretended sincere

dispositions. It must be allowed, indeed, that a sacrament does not confirm all persons in grace: one may relapse after it by surprise, and through some extraordinary occasion, or after the grace of reconciliation has been gradually weakened by a train of smaller infidelities. But to return to sin soon and easily must clearly demonstrate, that the conversion was false and only pretended; especially if this has frequently happened, as in habitual relapses. This appears from the nature of the grace of justification. True repentance is grace, and the most extraordinary of graces. Now, all works of God are strong and effectual. He raised not Lazarus from the grave, that he might die immediately again. His cures of the sick and lame were not for an instant; but true and to endure. Thus, when he justifies a sinner, he makes it not a shadow, but a solid work, able to stand proof. The foolish man may build on sand; not so God. His edifice is raised on a rock, with good foundations, able to bear up against winds and storms. He does not raise the sinner by halves, so weakly as only to furnish in him an immediate triumph to the devil over himself and his grace. Such a repentance is a shadow of a conversion, only that the devil may be glorified by it. Christ says, that Lazarus's short death was only a sleep, that God may be glorified by it.

God accompanies sanctifying grace, in the justification of a sinner, with all other necessary helps and graces to support and preserve it. Before a fall, there must be a long weakening by degrees: many dangers neglected, many smaller infidelities must have impaired them, and paved a way to the fatal precipice. The gulf of a relapse follows not so close on the grace of reconciliation. An habit of grace is settled in firm and lasting dispositions; it is never floating and inconstant. It is then plain, that where a man relapses again easily, by ordinary temptations, in a short time; where he falls without having for some time resisted the enemy, used great efforts, maintained his ground a considerable time, his conversion could never have been true. The dignity of the nature of the sacrament obliges us to form this judgment.

St. Paul, Rom. vi. 4, 5, 6, 9, gives this essential idea of a true repentance, that it resembles the resurrection of Christ, who, now that he is risen, dies no more. Do we see David, St. Paul, Magdalen, or other true penitents, return again to the vomit? It is the double-minded that is inconstant in his ways. "*Vir duplex animo inconstans est in viis suis.*"—James, i. 8. Such persons resemble phantoms of bodies, which appear a short time like bodies risen, but soon vanish, while the corpse itself never leaves the grave.

2. The very nature of repentance shows it to be of a permanent nature. In the conversion of a sinner, a contract is passed between him and God. Almighty God engaged himself to pardon him past offences, and to afford him abundant graces and succours for the time to come. The condition on the sinner's side, without which there could be no such thing as true repentance, was a sincere sorrow for and a hearty detestation of sin above all things, with an effectual resolution of avoiding it, and all the occasions of it, at all rates, for evermore. To pretend to repent, without this essential disposition, is only to mock God, insult the Church, and profane the most holy sacraments. Now, is it possible, that one who, after confession, returns to the vomit, almost on the first occasion, who commits, perchance before the end of the week, and by usual occasions, what he pretends to have abhorred above all evils on the Sunday, whose life, perhaps, is made up of such repentances and relapses, should ever have truly detested sin?

In penance, an entire new creature is formed with great labour and successive endeavours. This is a work of time, raised by degrees. It has its commencement and its progress, till it be at length finished. The will, in a state of sin, is weak, sick to death, fettered, and fast bound; it requires time to recover, pass through a state of convalescence, and regain its strength and liberty. God's graces in a conversion are bestowed, according to the ordinary law of his providence, gradually: they work for some time to finish the change. They first excite the will; then raise it higher, and lastly complete the thorough reformation. God can convert the most criminal soul in a moment: we have examples of such conversions in holy Scripture; but all miraculous in grace. In the common course of things, the first motions are only desires, half wills, small efforts. In many hasty confessions of mortal sin, these are mistaken for real changes, and pass for repentance. Hence false conversions and relapses are so frequent. Vicissitudes of rising and falling are unknown among true penitents, according to the constant doctrine of the Fathers of the Church.

Penance does not make a soul impeccable. Man is always frail and changeable. But the will cannot be turned from one extreme to another all at once. Repentance fixes the will strongly: grace is in possession, and cannot be expelled but by many struggles. The will is quite changed: the affections are removed from their darling objects to their opposites: the soul now hates sovereignly what she before loved and adhered to. In a word, the sinner is become another man, having put off the old man with all his acts and desires, and put on the new one, who is created according to

God. Eph. iv. 33. No one certainly can imagine, that a person thus changed can easily fall back into sin. For the same will, alternately to abhor sovereignly and to embrace immediately the same thing, is almost as plain an impossibility, as for it to love and hate the same thing at the same time. Our will commands itself, and cannot change but by its own free choice. It is an illusion for a man to say that he had the will, yet did not do the thing when he had it in his power.

Nor is the case altered if he has relapsed through some ordinary occasion, which ought to have been foreseen and avoided, had the resolution been perfect. Did we ever see a man earnest in the pursuit of an affair, who did not study the means to compass it, and to ward off accidents and dangers? A merchant putting to sea, takes care to inform himself of, and to shun the rocks and sands to be met with in his voyage. Whosoever, then, relapses by such occasions, which he ought to have foreseen and prevented or armed himself against, or by ordinary temptations, had no effectual desire to avoid sin.

He imagines himself converted; but we must be persuaded that he deceives himself, and does not know his own dispositions. He mistakes certain ineffectual motions for a thorough conversion. He thinks he can best sound his own heart, and is the best judge of his own resolutions, but of all men on earth he is, in this matter, the most incapable. The bias of passions sways him, self-love blinds him, faint desires and half resolutions deceive him. We see in the example of St. Augustin, that a sinner may have very strong *velleities*, long before his heart is completely changed. But he will say, he is sure that now his resolution is perfectly taken. He must, however, give us leave to answer him with the philosopher Seneca, Ep. 112. ad Lucilium: "I do not say he lies; for I am persuaded he really thinks so: but bad men both love and hate their crimes at once. Let him then excuse us from believing him sincere, till the change of his life has convinced both himself and us that he really is so."

It is only this actual amendment of life that can prove the sincerity of his conversion, both to himself and others, because this alone can distinguish effectual resolutions from mere desires. All other signs are sometimes equivocal. The same words and protestations are often used by the most hardened sinners and perfect penitents. Saul used as strong expressions to Samuel as David to Nathan. Sighs and tears are also treacherous and deceitful. Who would not be convinced by the lamentable sighs

of Esau, Saul, or Antiochus, which yet touched not the heart of God? We have, then, no other certain rule to judge by but that laid down by our Redeemer: "Ye shall know them by their fruits."—Matt. vii. 20. A man's works are the fruits of his heart. It is known and seen only in them. A change of life, constant holy manners, a dread and careful shunning of all dangerous occasions, and a practice of penitential works, would show the heart new: but the heart can never be changed whilst it continues to produce the same fruit. The sinner may have resolved and wept; but perhaps is not perfectly changed. Jesus knows his interior, and gives his grace of reconciliation only to the sincere convert. "Many believed in his name: but Jesus did not trust himself to them, for he knew all men."—John, xi. 24. "It appears, therefore, but it is not really a repentance to often ask pardon for what we often commit," says St. Clemens of Alexandria, Strom. l. 2. p. 439; adding, that they who relapse after penance do not differ from heathens, except by a fuller knowledge of sin.

3. The unanimous tradition and practice of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church make this truth incontestible. They are the channels through which we receive the waters of life, and the rules of virtue and salvation. We cannot then reject their authority in this point. Were their sentiments to be given at length, whole books might be copied out. Two short reflections will suffice to show us their principles on this important article.

Nothing is more frequently spoken of, or more manifest in Church history, than how cautious the ancients were not to expose our most holy sacraments to the profanation of sinners. Hence, if any one, after having once performed canonical penance, had the misfortune to fall again, he was never admitted to it a second time, but remained excluded from the participation of the sacraments till the article of death, consigned to continual sighs and tears, preparing himself to receive only then the benefit of reconciliation. The reasons which they universally allege for this severity are, lest sin should be encouraged by such lenity, false penitents admitted to the sacraments, and penance be done in vain, if a second time; for is it not enough to be once admitted? says Tertullian, de Pœnit. c. 7. And St. Austin, Ep. Ol. 64. nunc 153. ad Maced. says: "It is cautiously and wholesomely provided that place be allowed only once to that humble penance, lest a remedy, by being too common, should be less useful." St. Ambrose writes thus, l. 2. de Pœnit. p. 436. "Those are justly reprehended, who think that penance ought to be reiterated, because

they are luxurious* in Christ. For, if they did penance truly, they would not think it should be afterwards reiterated, because, as there is but one baptism, so is there but one penance which is done publicly, and so of more grievous sins."

A second remark is, that for fear of being imposed upon by false penitents, they never gave the benefit of reconciliation, even after the first fall, till the sinner had given proof of his sincerity by a long, severe course of penances in humiliations, prayer, fasting on bread and water, lying on the ground, and other mortifications, longer or shorter, according to their sins. So much did they fear a relapse and want of a perfect conversion.

For, as St. Isidore says, l. de Sum. Bono, and from him the Canon law, Dist. 5. de Pœnit.: "He is a scoffer, not a penitent, who commits what he repented of. Nor is he cleansed who weeps for his sins, yet does not forsake them, but reiterates after penance what he wept for." They knew that a conversion requires to will strenuously and perfectly: "Not to pass to-and-fro a half-wounded will; in which one side rising is struggling with the other side falling," as St. Austin says, Conf. B. viii. c. 8.

From these principles, in the tribunal of penance, a penitent is to be ordinarily believed the first time, if he has taken leisure, and used endeavours proportionably to his offence, except in violent habits, which require a trial, or in sins of injustice, in which restitution is often most advisedly required before absolution. But in relapses, which have easily followed repentance, not only a trial is requisite, but former confessions are to be suspected and carefully inquired into.

* 1 Tim. v. 11.

# MORAL DISCOURSES

ON THE

# SUBLIME TRUTHS AND IMPORTANT DUTIES

OF

# CHRISTIANITY.

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## DISCOURSE I.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST IS THE ESSENTIAL CONSTITUENT OF A TRUE CHRISTIAN, AND OUR SPIRITUAL LIFE.

"THIS is everlasting life," says our blessed Redeemer, "that they know thee, the only true God, and him whom thou hast sent, Jesus Christ." To know God and ourselves is the whole science of the saints. It will avail us little to measure the heavens, know the stars, calculate their revolutions, explain the properties of all bodies and all the secrets of nature, if it were possible, unless this knowledge be referred to the improvement of our knowledge of God and of ourselves. Without this foundation of all virtue, grace, and salvation, the most profound skill in the whole circle of the sciences, and the most sublime mysteries of theology, can only serve to aggravate our spiritual miseries and criminal blindness. This knowledge alone leads to salvation, heals our spiritual disorders, and puts us in possession of all the treasures of virtue and grace. By studying ourselves we discover our nothingness, spiritual blindness, weakness, insufficiency, sinfulness, baseness, passions and disorders, with their cure; our dignity, advantages, and improvements in all virtues and graces. These are the subjects of our pious meditations, by which we are profoundly grounded in humility and compunction, and which are the foundation of all solid, true virtue. The knowledge of ourselves is necessarily connected with that of God, so as to be perfected only by it. In the bright beams of his eternity, immensity, sanctity, and

other infinite perfections, we more clearly discern and more intimately feel our own nothingness, and the depth of our wounds, and seek our only remedy and salvation in God.

The saving knowledge of God is not a mere confession of his adorable being and perfections, but a knowledge which gives the soul most enlightened conceptions, and penetrates the heart with the most feeling sentiments of his eternity, infinity, goodness, mercy, justice, and other attributes. This knowledge stirs up in us the most profound adoration, and the most ardent love of God, the most awful fear of his sanctity, justice, and judgments, the most active zeal for his honour, and the most fervent, perpetual fidelity in studying and obeying his divine law, and accomplishing most perfectly his most holy will in all things, and with the most vehement desire of the most perfect union with him in time and in eternity. The divine omnipotence, omniscience, sanctity, justice, love, mercy, and other attributes are nowhere displayed in so wonderful and incomprehensible a manner as in the incarnation of God the Son. It is in the mysteries and sacred life of Christ that we attain to the most perfect knowledge of God, and of his wisdom and love. God is styled the Invisible,—1 Tim. i. 1.—being in his own nature and attributes incomprehensible to all creatures. He is the infinitely perfect model, and the unfathomed abyss of all perfection and all sanctity. In our contemplation of his immensity we are totally lost in the depth of our nothingness, and unable to attain a height removed infinitely above our reach. We conceive virtue in him, and all attributes, so as to adore, praise, love, and fear his Majesty with sentiments which we are not able to express or frame conceptions of; and we study to copy his divine virtues in our own souls; but removed at a dread, immense distance. God has been pleased to come out of himself by the incarnation of his divine co-eternal Son, to manifest himself to us in all his ineffable attributes in a manner accommodated to our weakness. Through his infinite condescension in this wonderful mystery, his omnipotence, wisdom, love, goodness, justice, and mercy are presented to us in such bright rays of effulgency, that, whilst our souls are overpowered by their unspeakable immensity, we seem in some measure to see and to feel them; so wonderfully are they communicated to our souls even by our senses. Christ is made man to show us the boundless riches of his divinity, and lead us to the possession of the same.

Christ came to give life to the world, which we can only receive by knowing him, by faith, hope, and love. "This," says he, "is

life everlasting." "This is the will of my Father who sent me, that every one who seeth the Son, and believeth in him, may have everlasting life."—John, vi. 40. "He that believeth in me hath everlasting life. I am the way, the truth, and the life."—John, vi. 47, 48. "I came that they may have life, and may have it more abundantly." The knowledge of Christ is the only means by which we can rise from the spiritual death of sin, from the state of blindness and slavery of the law of our sensual appetites; the only means by which we can receive the life of grace, exert its vital functions by the exercises of divine love, be enriched with the treasures of all heavenly virtues, be exalted to the dignity of children of God, and be enrolled in the book of life and the society of the saints. So precious a grace is it truly to know Christ by holy contemplation and love.

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## DISCOURSE II.

### CHRIST THE SPIRITUAL LIGHT OF SOULS.

Christ comes the light of the world. The prophets from the beginning were sent by God to set up a light of divine faith, and revelation of a Redeemer, in the world. These were to the ancient just the greatest blessings and mercies. But they were only a kind of participation of the light; only borrowed rays derived from him who is the light itself, the essential and original light, the eternal wisdom and truth, "who enlighteneth every man who cometh into the world" (John, i. 9), not only by the light of understanding and reason stamped in his soul, but also by holding up to him the supernatural light of divine faith. All these were messengers of holy joy to the faithful, loving soul; most dear and welcome to her heart. Their oracles are ever received and meditated on with the greatest veneration, love, and devotion. Yet in reading them she seeks him with greater eagerness, whom they foretell as to come; she is not satiated till he appears to her, and till she hears his voice. The precursor came, greater than all the prophets; his entrance into the world is accompanied with so many wonderful visions, revelations, mysteries, and miracles as raised astonishment in all men, insomuch that some mistook him for the Messiah. He pointed him out in the midst of the people; and showed all the divine promises, all the

types, figures, and predictions to be accomplished in him. The nearer he approaches the light, the greater is the joy with which his words fill our souls. Nevertheless, most welcome, most joyful as his coming and divine message are, my expectation and desire are but the more enkindled. Him I seek, him I long to adore, whom the Baptist announced: "He was not the light, but came to bear witness of him that was the light."—John, i. 3. I revere and repeat with jubilation and adoration every oracle in which the ancient saints saluted him in spirit with joy, and announced him to come; but I redouble my sighs till he comes in person to fill all my desires.

God "dwells in inaccessible light" (1 Tim. vi. 15, 16); is himself styled emphatically the light (Mich. vii. 8), being the infinite wisdom, reason, and justice, and the source and fountain of all reason. His co-eternal Son, subsisting, consubstantial Word, increated Wisdom, is in the same manner the light proceeding from the Father, Light of light, true God of true God. *Symbolum Niccæn.*, &c. He came into this world "to enlighten those who are seated in darkness and shades of death" (Luke, i.); to dispel the darkness of our ignorance of heavenly things, and to correct our errors. The prophets, the ministers and preachers of his law, from the first patriarchs down to the last of the prophets, were lights to men to teach and direct them in heavenly truths; but were only shadows of Christ; their light was borrowed from him who was sent, the true light of the world, from the Father. In him only shall we find all the light of heavenly truth which will cure our blindness, the first obstacle to true virtue in our souls. Shall we hope to meet with it in the boasted schools of the ancient philosophers? Their pretended wisdom belies itself. Their doctrine is a mixture of light and darkness; of some great truths with much more extravagant folly; and their lives were disgraced and defiled by the most base vanity and pride, and in many by the most shameful lusts of the flesh. Rom. i. 24. When we consider their fatal practical errors, and the baneful poison of the passions which often infected their hearts and actions, in what raptures of joy and gratitude do we turn our eyes to him who is truth itself, and perfect wisdom and sanctity!

Shall we hope to meet with better information and maxims of wisdom among the wise, the men of wit and genius, or the great men of the world, the polite circles, or the modish philosophers of the age? All these are votaries of the idols of the world, slaves to ambition, avarice, sensual appetites, and other lawless passions;

venders of all the false maxims which form the code of that worldly wisdom, against which the gospel of Christ levels the thunder of its sacred and most dreadful anathemas, and to condemn and reform which Christ appeared on earth. The saints and just are indeed lights of the earth, who by their example and doctrine trace out to us the path of truth and virtue, and direct us securely to walk in it. But this wisdom they received entirely from Christ; they only bid us follow them, because they follow him who is the unerring light both to them and us. Ps. xxxiii. 6. Draw near to him and you will be enlightened. Keep your eye on him; keep your minds and hearts close united to him. In the brightness of his light, to be found by devout meditation on his sacred mysteries, life, and doctrine, you will walk securely in the light of the blessed, which he points out to you, together with the path which conducts thither. "He who follows me," says he, "walks not in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

## DISCOURSE III.

### GOD IS OUR REDEEMER.

So boundless, so infinite, is the love of my God towards me, that he, the Impassible, Omnipotent, Infinite, and Eternal, was pleased for me to clothe himself with a mortal body and be subjected to the greatest ignominies and contempt; to hunger, thirst, labour, and all the hardships of a severe poverty; and at last to buffetings, stripes, a crown of thorns, crucifixion, potion of gall and vinegar, and innumerable other bitter torments, and a most cruel death; to reproaches, scorn, being covered with spittle, kicked, bruised, and made the last of mankind and an outcast of the people; in a word, to all that hell could invent either of cruelty or contempt. Thus far did love overcome the Omnipotent, and conquer the Invincible. How does my God love me! can I, after this, ever doubt of his tenderness towards me!

He suffered all this for me, while I by sin was his enemy. A king that pardons a rebel, though it costs him nothing, shows great goodness for him; but for a God to suffer so much for rebellious, sinful creatures argues no less than infinite love. Truly, to an excess does God love me, who, to redeem a slave, a base, ungrateful creature, spares not his Son, nor does the Son spare

himself. "No man," says our blessed Redeemer, "has greater love than to lay down his life for his friends." Yet, divine Redeemer, you had far greater in laying down yours for the most undeserving of enemies. That rule is true among creatures, though we rarely find an example of it amongst them; but your love exceeds all bounds, and knows no measure. Scarcely will one die for a just man; but you have died for the unjust, that you might justify sinners gratis, that you might make slaves your brethren, captives your heirs, banished criminals kings. How does infinite love here shine to the astonishment of creatures!

So did God love the world as to give his only Son. John, iii. Who? the Immense, Immortal, Independent, Self-existent, and eternally happy in himself: the great King of glory and God of the universe. For whom? base ungrateful enemies and sinners. How much? it would have been a great condescension for him to have conceived a favourable thought of us; or to have sent an angel or archangel to visit us; but he sent his only co-eternal and consubstantial Son to take upon him the appearance of a sinner, and to redeem us by his sufferings and death. Tell us how much he loved us; his love is unparalleled, infinite, and far exceeding all measure of bounds. How much, then, did he love us? So much,—no other word could express it,—so much as to give his only Son for us. Ah, how much does this *so* signify! Stand amazed, my soul, and ponder well this short but expressive particle. Labour to make some return of love; and place the greatest confidence in him, who loved thee to such excess.

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## DISCOURSE IV.

### ON GOD'S PROVIDENCE.

NOTHING happens by chance. God's providence governs all things, conducting them to the end for which they were created. He is not like an architect, who, when he builds a house, leaves it to itself. No; he sustains and governs everything that he has made. In him we live, move, and have our very being. All things are from him, by him, and in him. Rom. ii. Every action, every circumstance, every accident, even every motion of a leaf is directed by him. Fire, hail, sea, and storms obey his voice. He clothes the lilies of the fields, and not a sparrow falls to the ground but by

his order. My soul, how little hast thou always attended to this sweet and tender providence! Consider everything as coming from, and ordered by him.

God has a particular providence over his elect. Everything by his orders contributes to their good. Sickness or health, prosperity or adversity, poverty or plenty, all is sent by God for my greater good. To murmur at anything is to rebel against God. If I take any medicine or potion from a skilful and loving friend, because I know he gives it me for my good, can I refuse to receive anything from the hands of my God? He is infinitely wise and knows what is best for me; he is infinitely good and loves me tenderly; he is omnipotent and master of all riches and graces: can I then fear that anything can happen to hurt me? If he sends me sickness, persecution, or affliction, I will joyfully receive it, because it comes from his hands, and is designed for my good. If Job suffered, it was for his trial and merit. If Joseph was sold into Egypt, it was to preserve his whole family. So, if God afflict me, it is for my benefit. I will, then, always hope in him, though he were to kill me. If I were to die of famine and misery, or in torture and disgrace, his holy will be done; die once I must. Such a death would deliver me from this miserable life, and open to me the gates of heaven. I will throw all my solicitude on God; he will take care of me. His eye is always fixed on my wants, as they were on Daniel in the lion's den, and on the three children in the furnace. He can deliver me, if he see it for the best. The three children feared not the mighty king, having him for protector.

If I seek earnestly and in the first place the kingdom of God, all other things will be given to me. If God clothe the flowers of the fields, and feed the birds of the air, he will never abandon me in temporal, much less in spiritual wants. He has done so much for me, that he cannot now forsake me, and leave his work imperfect, unless through my great fault. He will never permit me to be tempted above my strength, nor to be deprived of the means of grace. He is the good shepherd of my soul, who has laid down his soul for me, and by the greatest torments has procured for me eternal life. I live in the fold of this charitable shepherd, and am received into the number of his sheep. He feeds me with his own precious blood. He knows all his flock, and the wants of each; he loves them, and is entirely taken up in the care of them, constantly attentive over them, to strengthen the weak, and seek those that are gone astray, to carry on his shoulders those that are

languishing. O, my soul, study to know and love this thy pastor. He is good and charitable; abandon thyself entirely to his conduct. He is wise; put a firm confidence in him. He is all-powerful; obey his voice. He is just and holy; cast thyself entirely into the arms of his amiable providence.

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## DISCOURSE V.

### A SERMON ON HEAVEN.

"*And, therefore, now indeed you have sorrow; but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no one shall take from you.*"*—John, xvi. 22.

The apostles were seized with a deep melancholy and sadness when they understood, though imperfectly, that their divine Master was going to leave them, for whose sake they had quitted all they possessed, and foregone all worldly prospects of a livelihood, and by whose heavenly conversation they had now conceived so high a veneration and so tender an affection for his person, that to lose him seemed worse than death. "Let us go and die with him,"† John, xvi. 16, said one of them; for without Jesus's sweet company they could relish nothing in life. "Because I have spoken these things to you, sadness has filled your hearts."‡ John, xvi. 6. And it must be a continual grief to any pious Christian amongst us to see that our heavenly spouse, our amiable Jesus, has quitted us, and fled to heaven without so much as saluting us. "How came you to leave me without taking leave, when in brightest glory you ascended to heaven?"§—St. Bern. Serm. 2. Ascens.; leaving us only mortification and sufferings for our portion, instead of those immense joys we were created for; still excluded from those happy mansions, encompassed by enemies on all sides, and hourly exposed to a thousand snares and dangers, and unavoidably obnoxious to sicknesses and innumerable miseries and anxieties; our bodies worn out with perpetual hurry and

* Et vos igitur nunc quidem tristitiam habetis; iterum autem videbo vos, et gaudebit cor vestrum, et gaudium vestrum nemo tollet a vobis.

† Eamus et moriamur cum eo.

‡ Quia hæc locutus sum vobis, tristitia implevit cor vestrum.

§ Quomodo me reliquisti insalutatum, cum formosus in stola sua Rex gloriæ in alta cœlorum te recepisti?

labour, our souls wearied with anxiety and fatigue. Our blessed Saviour, out of compassion for our desolate condition, promised he would not leave us orphans, or destitute of a comforter; and, therefore, he has left us his holy peace, that calmness and tranquillity of mind, that resignation and confidence in his mercy, which far surpasses whatever pretended contentment the world can afford to its adorers; he also sends us his comforting Spirit, who, by his frequent consolations, gives us foretastes of what is prepared for us in heaven; but these are only drops allowed to our fainting souls, not to reward, but to encourage us. God here shows his sweetness only "in a flash, and for a moment."* St. Bern. de Dilig. Deo, c. 10: "His stay is short, and he seldom comes;"† for the devil's envy, our own fault, or a busy world, soon draws us to earth again; and this, being only "a looking-glass and an inadequate representation,"‡ serves but to inflame our souls with a more languishing desire of being united to God immortally, and forces us to cry out with more vehemence: "Ah me, because my stay is prolonged!"§ mourning that our exile is prolonged, continually to see our God derided by infidels, blasphemed by heretics; his precious blood sacrilegiously trampled under foot by those very Catholics, on whom he has so plentifully showered his most singular favours; and our country, once his chosen vineyard, become a prey to hell. "I heard a voice like that of a woman in labour; I heard her groans in labour. It was the voice of expiring Sion stretching out her hands. Ah me, I am ready to faint!"‖ Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed in an instant; but here souls perish, and perish everlastingly. "If I cry for mercy, God has excluded my prayer."¶—Lament. iii. 8. Our fellow-creatures, so near and dear to us by all the bonds of nature, live deprived even of the knowledge of God's sweet yoke, and daily by thousands become the eternal butt of all the arrows of his divine vengeance. "I am exceedingly sad, and my heart is wrung with grief; for I wished to be an outcast for my brethren, who are my relations according to the flesh."** We find so many causes

* Raptim et ad momentum. † Parva mora et rara bora.

‡ Speculum ut in ænigmate.

§ Heu mihi quia incolatus meus prolongatus est.

‖ Vocem quasi parturientis audivi, angustias ut puerperæ; vox filiæ Sion intermorientis, expandentisque manus; Væ mihi, quia deficit anima mea!

¶ Sed et cum clamavero et rogavero exclusit orationem meam.

** Tristitia mihi magna est et continuus dolor cordi meo; optabum enim egoipse anathema esse pro fratribus meis, qui sunt cognati mei secundum carnem.

of sorrow concentrated in our breasts, too small to contain such great griefs, and no comfort except always to have before our eyes the eternal joys of heaven, as Christ, for our example, "with joy suffered on a cross, despising confusion."* If we look on those immense rewards already prepared by Christ, and now, as I may say, waiting for us, the world appears as smoke; all labours and difficulties vanish; this thought alone makes us superior to all dangers, and an overmatch for the devil's malice. O! could mortal hearts but conceive, did wretched worldlings, drowned in earthly pleasures, but know what and how great are the joys of heaven, how would they despise those fading vanities, and say with St. Francis of Sales: "I would not give a bending of my finger to have kingdoms at my back, to have the command or disposal of the universe!" To excite our sluggish tepidity, and encourage our desponding souls amidst all these difficulties, according to the words of my text, I design to say something of that blessed kingdom, and those rewards, now laid up in store for us, as methodically as so ample a subject and my intended brevity will permit. First let us, from this vale of miseries, implore the intercession of the Queen of Heaven. Ave Maria.

It would be the highest presumption, did I attempt to give a full description of the joys of heaven. St. Paul having been caught up to the third heaven, and heard those secrets which it was never in the power of man to utter, assures us they far surpass what mortal hearts can conceive; "and that neither eye hath seen, nor ear heard, nor has it ever entered into the heart of man, what God has prepared for those that love him."—1 Cor. ii. 9. We may, however, frame some imperfect idea of it, if we consider that this is the glorious kingdom which our great Creator has prepared to manifest the riches and extent of his goodness and power to his beloved servants, and in which he communicates himself in all his majesty, and with all the charms of his sweetness, to his chosen creatures for all eternity. As a great king performs whatever he undertakes in a noble and royal manner, becoming his dignity, so God does everything worthy of an infinite, omnipotent author; even his punishments on the damned are such as no other could inflict; "Who alone does wonders."†—Ps. lxxi. 18. Now love and mercy are the most transcendant of the divine attributes, as we may see in this, that from them alone proceed all the most

* Proposito sibi gaudio sustinuit crucem confusione contempta.
† Qui facit mirabilia magna solus.

astonishing mysteries both in the order of grace and nature. Love overcame an omnipotent God so as to make him become man, and die for us, ungrateful creatures; let us hence form our conjectures of what it will prompt him to effect in the consummation of all the works of his mercy, and in manifesting the excess of his infinite goodness to his beloved creatures. In all his works he shows himself God; but in this he may be said far to surpass himself, as it far surpasses all his other works; for here his goodness and wisdom in suggesting, and his power in effecting, unite, and exert themselves to the utmost. We admire the beauty, splendour, magnificence, and symmetry of each part of this world, which God created only to be the place of our banishment and sufferings; that infinite number of stars, and their surprising magnitudes; the sun, a million times larger than the earth, and at the distance of sixty millions of miles and upwards; the stars still forty thousand times higher. Yet these immense bodies, in so different and seemingly opposite motions, are regulated in the most exact uniformity by that sovereign intelligence, who holds the universe in his hand, and weighs the earth as a grain of sand, and the sea as a drop of water. Hence, drawing down our feeble eyes to the minutest objects, had we but senses quick enough to pursue the almost infinite divisibility of the least atom, or grain of sand, we should continually find new worlds; for the meanest object is a most delicate and wonderful machine, composed of a complication of numberless tubes and springs, divided and subdivided without end, in admirable harmony and communication with one another. Yet this immensity of the universe, that variety of myriads of living creatures, with which each element—nay, even every particle of matter seems to be filled, serve only to show the bountiful hand of our Creator. But I omit the miracles of the creation; it is sufficient to say, that we are not able to discover the very outside of the meanest object. Yet how surprising do the effects and laws of nature seem even to us! If, then, Almighty God, by one simple act of his will, could have produced ten thousand worlds, each infinitely more perfect than this, what an exalted idea must we conceive of that glorious kingdom where his omnipotent power will second his goodness in showing itself to the full? My soul here loses itself in amazement, and seems carried far beyond what she can express or even conceive. The Holy Ghost, by the seraphic pen of St. John (Apoc. xxi.), condescending to our weakness, who can only form our conceptions by what we see on earth, describes it as "a city paved with pure gold, pellucid as crystal, and

shining like jewels; the walls of precious stones, and the twelve gates of twelve immense diamonds; that it has no night, no sun, no moon, but that God himself enlightens it, and the Lamb is its lamp; that it is watered by a river clear as crystal, overshadowed on each bank by the tree of life." St. John adds, that he saw this new Jerusalem descend from heaven, to show that the earth, renewed in a most glorious manner, would then join, and both together become a heaven to the blessed. No misery can enter here; dangers and fears are totally unknown; death and sickness are eternally banished these walls. Our bodies, which are now unavoidably obnoxious to a thousand miseries from inclemency of air and an infinity of accidents, so that they are a most troublesome annoyance and dangerous enemies, will be then incorruptible and impassable, and endowed with the properties of a spirit, as they are termed by the apostle *spiritual bodies*, insomuch that the whole universe will not be able to hurt them, and so strong that nothing can resist them. So great will be their agility and swiftness, that St. Augustin (Ser. 227, col. 118, T. S.) compares it to that rapidity of light, than which we can conceive no motion swifter; "sooner shall the ray of thy light reach heaven than thy eye the nearest object;"* so wonderful their beauty, that the universe would appear deformed, if compared to one glorified body. "They shall shine like the sun."†—Matt. xiii. 13. So bright will they shine and dart such rays of piercing glory—"they shall shine as lightning in the kingdom of their Father"‡—Blos. monil.—that St. Teresa, and other saints, favoured with the visions of the blessed, declare, that the sight of one glorified body seems a sufficient felicity. Who would ever believe that this dull lumpish flesh, now subject to so many vicissitudes, should ever appear so glorious, and dazzle like lightning, did not the word of God so positively assert it? "And his countenance was like lightning."§—Matt. xxviii. 3. Our soul is now clogged and imprisoned by this heavy flesh: "the body which becomes corrupt, and aggravates the soul,"‖ is subject to anxieties and an hundred irregular passions; her will is vitiated, her memory and understanding obscured in a total darkness, even of our present condition. But when freed from this body of death, and all her incumbrances,

* Citius radius tuus pervenit ad cœlum quam palpebra ad supercilium.
† Fulgebunt sicut sol.
‡ Fulgebunt sicut fulgur in regno patris eorum.
§ Et erat aspectus ejus sicut fulgur.
‖ Corpus quod corrumpitur aggravat animam.

she shall be adorned with all natural gifts in the highest perfection; and by supernatural graces raised far above herself, she shall clearly see all things in their cause and source, viz., in God. "What can they be ignorant of who know him that knows everything?"*—St. Greg. l. 4. Dial. c. 33. Her memory will be delighted in revolving past combats, &c. She will be omnipotent as to her own will, not being able to desire anything but what is also the will of God. Even our corporeal senses and each member of our body shall find its peculiar pleasure; our eyes shall always feed on the beauty of heavenly objects; our ears be charmed with melodious hymns of praise, which the happy choirs incessantly sing to their Creator; and so of the rest. We see here the most surprising wonders of nature effected by means in appearance very trivial: slender vibrations of the air cause all the wonderful effects of music and sound; a small different modification and separation of light produces that variety of colours, which makes up the beauty and lustre of the universe; only a different configuration and texture of particles in lumpish matter effect all those riches of nature, which delight our sight, smell, and taste, and ravish all our senses. What incredible pleasures do we then imagine God has prepared for every sense? For we must consider that he makes it his glory to show himself wonderful in his saints, and to manifest his infinite wisdom and love in making everything concur to increase their felicity beyond measure. Add to all this the multitude of glorious companies in this never-fading felicity; the innumerable troops of virgins crowned with lilies, of martyrs bearing palms in their hands, of holy patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and other saints, each with his marks of victories, and the trophies of his multiplied triumphs: the thrones, dominations, principalities, powers, virtues, archangels, and angels, which make up that hierarchy of ministering spirits, always assisting before the throne of God; the seraphim all burning with flames of divine love, and communicating the same to inferior spirits; the cherubim drinking from the fountain of wisdom torrents of knowledge and delight, which they again pour forth on others; but above all, the glorious Queen of Heaven, seated above the seraphim on a throne of glory. We shall there also behold human nature placed on the very throne of God; we shall see a God-man, surrounded with all his charms, styling himself our brother and co-heir, and plentifully showering down torrents of sweetness on his elect. What charms

* Quid est quod nesciant qui scientem omnia sciunt.

of love, what rays of glory and majesty will shoot from his divine heart, and fill the breasts of those happy, redeemed souls! How will his virgin flesh and shining wounds dazzle our feeble eyes! St. Teresa (her Life, c. 28) having, in a vision, seen but a glimmering of his sacred humanity, assures us that the sight of it surpasses all we can express. Let us here stop a little, and consider what an additional joy will all these glorious companions be to our felicity; to enjoy their sweet, happy company, and intermix in their choirs. It is as great a pleasure to see those, whom we love as ourselves, partakers of felicity, as to enjoy it ourselves; so love will there make that of each happy spirit our own. It will be an unparalleled joy to see the infinite happiness which God, whom we shall then love according to our full capacity, enjoys in himself; and to see so many millions, so beloved by God, in the same felicity, will overwhelm our hearts, too narrow to contain so many and such great joys. "What, in this situation, must be the ecstacy of the human heart—that empty heart—that heart now corroded with care, overwhelmed with misery? Consult your own feelings on a subject of such perfect happiness. If the heart of man can scarcely contain his own joy, what must he feel under such an accumulation of felicity?"*—St. Anselm, Prolog. 25. Yet all that we have hitherto mentioned are no more than appendages and accidentals of that heavenly felicity, which consists in the clear sight and possession of God, in which is included all good; for it could not be termed "the sovereign good, the best of all possible good things,"† were any good found not comprised in this vision. If, then, the beauty of the universe, if the pleasures we meet scattered in created objects delight us, what shall we imagine of the full possession of all good in its source, from which all other perfections are but small emanations? "If you are delighted with things which scarcely deserve the name of blessings, what raptures must be excited by the contemplation of that unchangeable, unceasing felicity?"‡—St. Austin in Ps. 26. Why then do we divide our affections, wandering after so many objects, seeing that by God's infinite mercy we were created for so great a good;

* Cor humanum, cor indigens, cor expertum ærumnis imo obrutum ærumnis; quantum gauderes si his omnibus abundares? interroga intima tua si capere possint gaudium suum de tanta sua beatitudine?—Si cor hominis de tanto suo bono vix capiet gaudium suum, quomodo capax erit tot ac tantorum gaudiorum?

† Summum bonum, bonorum omnium summum.

‡ Si vos delectant bona, quæ non sunt bona, qualis erit contemplatio incommutabilis boni eodem modo semper manentis?

especially it being his eternal law that no smaller good can ever satiate us? "Woe be to that presumptuous soul who seeks happiness anywhere but in God. Turn on every side; all is vanity and affliction, and in God alone shalt thou find repose."*—St. Aug. Conf. l. 6. c. 16. Let us, then, fix our hearts on this one great good, in which we shall meet with all we can desire. "God pervades everything, governs everything, possesses everything; and out of him there is nothing."†—Idem. Solin. n. 4. Shall we so far debase our noble souls? "Shall the co-heir of Christ associate with brutes? Raise thy mind and thy hope to the source of all good."‡—Idem. in Ps. 102. Let your pleasure be, whilst on earth, to contemplate the glorious mansions prepared for you. "Hear, daughter, and see; forget thy people and the house of thy father, and the king shall court thy beauty."§ Behold the magnificence of that heavenly city lying, &c. under thy feet, and cry out to the king thy spouse: "Show me him whom my soul loves. Where dost thou feed; where dost thou repose at mid-day?"‖ Take thy flight, in imagination at least, through those lucid mansions; intermix with those happy citizens, and admire the cherubim, but boldly say: "Let it be fiery, though 'not fire itself;'¶ I seek the source of their happiness and glory; approach the throne gradually, and cry out: I have found him whom my soul loves. My beloved to me and I to him, who feeds amidst lilies."**—Cant. iii. 4. Are we not transported beyond ourselves as often as we think of this? Yes, we shall see God face to face, says St. Paul, having been caught up to the third heavens: we shall be like to him, because we shall see him as he is in himself. For St. John, though favoured with the sublimest visions, could express no further of it;—1 John, iii. "He spoke what he could, the rest must be felt by the heart."††

* Væ animæ audaci quæ speravit, si a te recessisset, se aliquid melius habituram; versa et reversa in tergum, et in latera, et in ventrem, et dura sunt omnia, et tu solus requies.

† Deus, sub quo totum est, in quo totum est, cum quo totum est, extra quem nihil est.

‡ Cohæres Christi quid socius est pecorum? erige spem tuam ad bonum bonorum omnium.

§ Audi, filia, et vide; et obliviscere populum tuum, et domum patris tui, et concupiscet rex decorem tuum.

‖ Indica mihi quem diligit anima mea, ubi pascas, ubi cubes in meridie.

¶ Ignita sit, non ignis.

** Inveni quem diligit anima mea. Dilectus meus mihi et ego illi, qui pascitur inter lilia.

†† Quomodo potuit lingua sonuit, cætera corde cogitentur.

Our souls, elevated in their own capacity by the "light of glory,"* shall contemplate the divinity, and be by love transferred as it were into God, as iron in the furnace seems totally changed into fire. We shall here know all nature in its cause, and penetrate the mysteries of grace; we shall see (St. Tho. in 4 Dist. 46, and 2, a 5) the eternal generation of the Son, the ineffable procession of the Holy Ghost, and be inflamed with their infinite love. The three divine persons have loved each other from all eternity; our intellect will always feed on the divine attributes, and always discover fresh subjects of joy and admiration in that endless ocean of perfection. God will by this vision communicate to our souls such torrents of pleasure as cannot be conceived. Filled brimful and inebriated with delights, those happy creatures sing; "nor do they cease night or day to cry out: Holy, holy, holy."† As birds in the sky fly up and down, encompassed on all sides by the air, so are they in the divinity; the divine sweetness totally overspreads them, and pierces their very marrow; every part both of body and soul will enjoy incredible pleasure. As a man drowning in the sea stretches out his hands and feet on all sides, but meets with nothing but water, so they in an ocean of sweetness find no end of pleasure. "There shall be joy within and without, over and under, on every side; thou shalt rejoice in everything, and for everything. The consideration of this future felicity fills me with admiration."‡—St. Bonav. l. de 4. Exercit. c. 4. But all we can say or conceive falls infinitely short of what heaven is: "We cannot explain it; but our joy will not suffer us to be silent."§—St. Aug. in Ps. 102. Let us, then, by hymns of jubilation pour forth the transports of our hearts. "Let all the earth rejoice in the Lord; let your tongues sound forth the excess of your joy; proclaim aloud your felicity."‖ St. Gertrude assures us that while the anthem, "I saw the Lord face to face"¶ (Div. Ins. l. 2. c. 22), was sung, the divine beauty penetrated her soul through and through, so that the joy crowded on her body, and, as it were, annihilated her very bones and marrow through excess of pleasure and sweetness, of which no tongue

* Lumen gloriæ.

† Nocte et die requiem non habent dicendo, Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus.

‡ Gaudium erit intus et extra, subtus et supra, circum et circa; gaudebis igitur in omnibus et de omnibus—jam futurum gaudium aspiciens præ admiratione deficio.

§ Ecce dicere non possumus, et præ gaudio tacere non permittimur.

‖ Jubilate Deo omnis terra; deferte vocem ineffabilem gaudiorum vestrorum eructate in eum lætitias vestras.

¶ Vidi Dominum facie ad faciem.

could express the least part. The same do all saints assure us of God's sweetness even in this life. "The saints conceive but a small portion of this abundance, and yet they speak of it with the utmost astonishment."*—St. Bonav. Serm. 10. in Pent. Though here our divine Spouse shows himself only "as in a looking-glass, and in a faint representation."† No wonder that the saints earnestly sighed to be dissolved, and to be with Christ. Tears "were my food night and day, while I am every day asked, where is thy God?"‡ And only the will of God, and to promote his honour, made life supportable to them. "I am straitened on every side, desiring to be dissolved and to be with Christ. But it is my lot to remain in the flesh for your sake."§—Phil. i. 23, 24. Let us, at least, pant after it, being weary of our banishment. "Thy desire of future happiness is incomplete, if thou dost not ask it daily with tears. You have not a proper idea of it, if anything in this life can afford you comfort."‖—St. Bern. Serm. 2. in Jejun. St. Teresa, Medit. O death, I know not who can fear thee, the gate of life! When will our soul break this tedious prison, to mount above the stars? When will that happy moment come, which will shut the eyes of my body, by which I see vanities, and open those of my soul, to behold God and his saints? What a pleasure will it be to extend her imagination in the endless labyrinth of eternity, to behold herself in security, and look down on earth, and see others fighting manfully amidst many shipwrecks? Oh, were that hour come, whither would the joys of heaven have now carried me! At present we eagerly pick up the crumbs of sweetness, which fall from that divine table; and even these the hurry of a busy world, the envy of the devil, the frailty of nature, or God himself, for our trial, soon deprives us of. But then, how will our weary and hungry souls cleave to that fountain of sweetness to satiate their thirst! How will they plunge themselves in that ocean of pleasure, just as a hart tired by the dogs throws himself into a clear river so eagerly, that one would think he sought to be turned into water, the better to enjoy the coolness of that

* Hujus abundantiæ vix scintillam capiunt sancti, et tamen eructant nobis mirabilia.

† Per speculum et in ænigmate.

‡ Fuerunt mihi lachrymæ panes die ac nocte, dum dicitur mihi quotidie, ubi est Deus tuus?

§ Coarctor e duobus desiderium habens dissolvi et esse cum Christo; multo magis melius, permanere autem in carne propter vos.

‖ Futura gaudia non satis concupiscis si ea quotidie cum lachrymis non postulas; minus tibi nota sunt, si non timuit consolari anima tua donec veniant.

element; but narrow hearts are not able even now to contain themselves at the very thought of this. "I doubt not but such is the happy condition of souls in heaven. I conceive but little of their happiness, but even that little I am unable to express."*—St. Bern. Serm. 2. in Cant. We now say in hope: "Glorious things are said of thee, O city of God!"† but shall then sing: "We now see every blessing, which was ascribed to thee."‡ God says to us: Labour a little, and you shall find eternal rest; and amidst your labours I afford you many consolations. He now discovers himself frequently as it were behind the wall. "Behold he stands behind our wall, looking through the windows and through the rails;"§ but will not fully satiate the soul. "Turn aside thy eyes, for they have made me shrink away from them."‖ Then his glory will not dazzle my eyes; "I shall then steadily fix my eyes on thy glory without being oppressed. On the contrary, I shall imprint myself upon it."¶—St. Bern. Serm. 62. in Cant. These foretastes serve only to inflame beyond measure the longing desires of a love-languishing soul. St. Francis of Sales, Love of God, c. 15, says: "For it is impossible that a soul, that has once tasted divine consolations, should live in the world, without continual pain and languishing." St. Francis Xavier often said: "For pity, O my God, overwhelm me not with the abundance of thy sweetness; or if, through thy goodness, thou wilt make me overflow with delights, take me to thyself." A soul, that has once tasted thee, must mourn her banishment in bitterness till she enjoy thee. "Even we, who have but a foretaste of spiritual joy, groan within ourselves."** Let us, then, regard ourselves as banished men, and dead to this world; "I am a sojourner on earth,"††—P's. 118; and sigh after our heavenly Jerusalem. The Jews in Egypt and in captivity were types of our banishment in this vale of miseries; let us, then, sit on the waters of this Babylon, and weep till we enjoy our crown. Can a banished man forget his country, or a labourer his wages? though he could, I will sooner forget my right

* Sic esse in cœlo non ambigo, ut lego in terris, ni quod ista exprimere non sufficio.

† Gloriosa dicta sunt de te, civitas Dei.

‡ Sicut audivimus sic vidimus.

§ En ipse stat post parietem nostrum; respiciens per fenestras, prospiciens per cancellos.

‖ Averte oculos tuos, quia ipsi me avolare fecerunt.

¶ Non me opprimet gloria ista totis licet viribus in se intendentem; ego potius imprimar illi.

** Quin et nos ipsi primitias spiritus habentes intra nos gemimus.

†† Incola ego sum in terra.

hand than thee, my dear Jerusalem. It is but the thin, half-broken wall of my body and a few moments, which stop that ocean of delights from overwhelming my soul. "O moment at once short and long, how can the time be short, which separates me from my God? The word of God must be true. Yes, this short moment is very long, too long for my wishes, but much too short for my merits."*—St. Bern. Serm. 74. in Cant. Let us thank God that he has created us for so noble an end, and given us still time to secure and increase this our reward. St. Aug. St. Chrys. l. 1. ad Theod. Let us not murmur or complain under labour or difficulties, but always seek new toils for God's honour and glory; were we to suffer a thousand deaths a day, for a thousand years, it would all be nothing, nor hell itself for some time, to gain so immense a crown. God exacts not a million, nor even a thousand years' labour; and can we think it much for an eternal kingdom, which deserves, if possible, an eternal labour? Let, then, heaven be our hope; "rejoicing in hope." † Love will make us trample on all difficulties, and despise the world's vanities; it flies, it runs, and it rejoices; ‡ it regards all as nothing to enjoy its object; and whatever hardships occur serve only to inflame it more, to burst through them, as a raging fire is not stopped, but increased beyond measure, when it meets with stubble. "Love is strong as death. Its lamps are lamps of fire and flames. The waters have not been able to extinguish charity, nor shall rivers overwhelm it. If man could purchase love by the loss of all he has, he might still be said to have procured it for nothing."§—Cant. ix. 6, 7. This will make life appear short and as nothing; it will make all difficulties vanish, and sweeten all labours. Love would not choose heaven, if possible, without labour. What a monster would that creature be in heaven, that came thither by a way different from that which Christ and all the saints have walked! Love rejoices the more opportunities it finds to suffer for the sake of its spouse. It is this that will give a heaven on earth by its sweetness in this life, and bring us the everlasting enjoyment of it after death, an happiness, &c.

* O modicum et longum. O modicum longum! modicum dicis quod non videbimus te? Salvum sit verbum Domini mei; longum est et multum valde nimis; verumtamen utrumque verum, et modicum meritis et longum votis.

† Spe gaudentes.

‡ Volat, currit, et lætatur.

§ Fortis est ut mors dilectio; dura sicut infernus æmulatio. Lampades ejus, lampades ignis atque flammarum. Aquæ non potuerunt extinguere charitatem, nec flumina obruent illam. Si dederit homo omnem substantiam suam pro dilectione, quasi nihil despiciet eam.

## DISCOURSE VI.

### ON THE VIRTUE OF RELIGION.

1. Religion is a moral virtue, which commands and pays to God that worship which is due to his sovereign majesty for his supreme excellence. It is the first, the most noble, and the queen of all virtues, as St. Thomas and all divines unanimously observe. Lactantius, Inst. l. 4, c. 28, derives the name Religion from the Latin word, *religo*, to bind, because it binds us to God; which is a tie more strong, more sacred, and more indispensable than that of any other virtue, such as piety towards our parents, or justice towards our fellow-creatures. The word *piety* often signifies religion; but it is more general, as it is applied to the duty of children to their parents, no less than to that which we owe to God. From the dignity, merit, and obligation of religion it necessarily follows, that a transgression against it, in any point of moment, is more grievous than a sin against any other moral virtue.

2. The motives which recommend to us the exercise of the virtue of religion are the most pressing, whether we consider those that are drawn from the supreme dignity of God, those drawn from ourselves, or those drawn from the obligation, excellence, and merit of the virtue itself. The first is the supreme excellence of the divine majesty. For "He is alone."—Job, xxiii. 13. Whence he says: "I am that I am."—Exod. iii. 14. In the same sense, "No one is good but God alone."—Mark, x. 18. "His name alone is exalted."—Ps. cxlviii. 12. To think of, or to express his incomprehensible greatness, all eloquence is dumb, and every understanding faint. The angels in heaven never cease praising him, crying out: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts!" which we on earth ought incessantly to repeat, annihilating ourselves in the admiration of his adorable majesty. "To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory for ever and ever, Amen"—1 Tim. i. 17; offering to him the sovereign homage of all our thoughts and actions. "Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and shalt serve him alone."—Deut. vi. 13.

3. A second motive is our essential dependence on God, in whom we live and move. We can have nothing, we can do nothing, but in and by God. It is, then, most just, that we should give to him the homage of all, and employ our whole life and strength for him, and to glorify his holy name.

To this we must add the innumerable and unspeakable benefits which we have received, and every moment do receive from him, in body and soul; for every one of which we owe him the perpetual homage of our praise and thanks.

Again, we belong to God, and are his. "All souls are mine."—Ezech. viii. 4. "All things which are under the heavens are mine."—Job, xli. 2.

Another consideration is, that God is our last end. "He is the first and the last, the beginning and the end."—Apoc. xi. and xxii. We are created to worship, love, and honour him. If we neglect this, we wilfully destroy the end of our being, and contemn so noble a dignity. Lactantius writes thus upon this subject: "Man, amongst living creatures, seems created upright, that he might be excited to the contemplation of his heavenly parent: he alone received the use of speech, that he might resound the majesty of his Lord. All things on earth are subject to him, that he might be subject to God, his Framer and Maker. If God would have man to be his worshipper, and on that account gave him so great honour as to make him lord of other things, it is most just that he should worship God, who has bestowed so great things upon him."—De Ira Dei, c. 13.

4. Other motives are, that God, who has forbidden this sovereign worship to be given to any other, has strictly commanded that it be paid to himself. Who can be so base, so ungrateful, and so insensible, as to transgress the positive, just, and necessary precept of so great a Lord, and so liberal and kind a benefactor?

Moreover, by baptism we solemnly bound ourselves to this obligation, and were incorporated in Christ for this end.

The eternal recompense, which God has promised to us, is also a strong spur to our sloth in this duty; it is proportioned to our fervour and assiduity, and so are the punishments prepared by him for those who shall be remiss in it. "Whoever shall glorify me, him I will glorify; but they who contemn me shall be ignoble."—1 Kings, xi. 30.

5. The singular excellence and advantages of the practice of this virtue recommend it strongly to us. Nothing is more honourable, nothing more noble, nothing more just or more suitable to a created being. If it be great or desirable in the eyes of the world to serve a glorious, just, bountiful, and powerful king, to attend always near his person, and enjoy his presence and conversation, what is it always to enjoy this favour with God?

5. Religion is a virtue most meritorious in itself, and which sanctifies a man's whole life, and all his actions, making them all perfect sacrifices to God. Corporal austerities, or exterior virtuous actions, are of little value, unless sanctified by it. Whence St. Paul recommends it to his beloved disciple in these words: "Exercise thyself unto godliness. For bodily exercise is profitable to little, but godliness is profitable to all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."—1 Tim. iv. 7, 8. By it a soul renews perpetually the consecration of herself to God; never ceases to adore him, and to sanctify his holy name; by her understanding forming in herself the highest idea possible of his immense greatness; by her heart and will, humbling and annihilating herself before God, and praising and magnifying him; by her tongue, offering him incessant sacrifices of vocal prayer; by her body, in exterior adorations; by all her actions, referring all of them to the divine honour.

6. The properties of the virtue of religion are a filial fear of God; a careful flight of sin and all dangerous occasions; an ardent zeal for God's honour; a perfect love or charity; a vehement desire of always advancing in the love and faithful service of God; a love and esteem for whatever belongs to the divine service; and a scrupulous exactness in it even to the minutest circumstance. An affectionate servant is attentive in the least things which regard his master's service. Much more ought we to be attentive in every circumstance of our actions that belong to the service of God. A spirit of religion is very solicitous not to neglect the least act of duty, remembering who he is whom it honours, and labouring to give, in the least things, a proof of a boundless zeal to honour him. Thus, it makes a man exact and fervent in observing the least ceremonies and rubrics of the Church in the divine office, because, animated with this virtue, he can look upon nothing small, in which the service of God is concerned. His care and watchfulness, indeed, are still greater in matters or precepts of a higher nature; but his intention and fervour suffice to give a great value to the lowest actions he does: for God chiefly considers the heart in everything.

7. The perfection of religion is, to worship and serve "God out of pure love and zeal, for his own sake. God will be worshipped gratis, and loved gratis, *i. e.*, chastely, not because he gives anything out of himself, but because he gives himself," says Augustin, in Ps. lii. Nothing can be an act of religion, unless it be done from the proper motive of that virtue, with the

most humble subjection and total sacrifice of the soul to God, and in acknowledgment of his supreme majesty and excellence. For which reason the learned Suarez takes notice, L. 1. c. 9, that if a person heard mass on a day commanded, solely out of obedience to the precept of the Church, it would be a mere act of obedience, not of religion, which essentially requires at least a virtual intention of worshipping God for his supreme grandeur and omnipotence.

To understand the words employed in the definition of religion, it is to be observed, that honour is a confession of another's excellence: glory is an extended reputation with praise: worship is the testimony of another's superiority, and of the submission of ourselves to him. Hence a king may honour, but cannot worship his nobles. The supreme worship appropriated to God alone is called by the Greeks *latria*, a word applied only to God in the New Testament, and the writings of the Fathers. That inferior worship, which is paid to the blessed saints and angels in heaven, is called *dulia*, as Bede observes in cap. 4. Lucæ. St. Austin takes notice of the same, L. 10. de Civit. c. 1, where he says, that the worship due to a creature is not called *latria* by the Apostle, Ephes. vi. 6, but by another name; which is in that place *dulia*. To honour in the saints their intrinsic perfections is their inferior worship of *dulia*, which is distinct in its species from the act of religion: but it is a worship of religion, if the sovereign majesty of God be honoured in them.

8. Religion is an universal virtue, which offers to God and sanctifies all our other actions and virtues. These, if offered to God, and performed with the intention of worshipping him, and as homages to his supreme excellency, are, by this act, made acts of religion. Hence, this is called by the Fathers the foundation of all virtues. "Piety towards God is the beginning of understanding. Piety is the foundation of all virtues," says St. Ambrose, L. 1. Offic. c. 27. The word *piety* is, on this account, often used for all virtues; and we call a virtuous, true Christian religious. "We say, that he only who is pious and religious is a true Christian," says St. Clement of Alexandria, in Paræsesi ad Gentes. For a man, adorned with religion, sacrifices his heart and all his actions to God, and his whole life cannot but be devoted to God, and filled with all suitable virtues and good works, which will each be enhanced and ennobled by the additional dignity and merit of religion that accompanies them. This is also a virtue which has no bounds. It is founded on a law of

justice, to pay to God the homage we owe to his sovereign dignity; though, as no strict justice can intervene between God and creatures, it is not a proper or perfect justice: whereas creatures can never pay to God a homage proportioned to his greatness, or perfectly honour him as he deserves to be honoured. Religion, however, applies itself, to the utmost capacity of our soul, to honour him on earth, whom the blessed in heaven can never sufficiently honour by their incessant praises, and it borrows the succours of all other virtues, to pay what it owes to its sovereign Lord. A zealous soul adds to every action the merit of charity and religion, referring both to the love and honour of God.

9. The proper acts of religion are those that contain a protestation and acknowledgment, which man makes of his subjection to God, as his sovereign Lord, and those by which we serve him as our Lord, and obey him as our Father. St. Thomas counts two interior acts of religion: devotion and prayer. These are the principal and most excellent. The following are exterior acts of religion: they only belong to religion, as they are referred to the interior: adoration, sacrifice, oblation of first-fruits, gifts, and tithes, a vow, an oath, adjuration, divine praise, and thanksgiving. For there are three kinds of goods, which man dedicates and subjects himself to God by offering: viz., those of the soul, which are spiritual, by adoration, devotion, prayer, vows, and lawful oaths; those of the body, which he subjects to God by exterior acts of adoration joined with the interior, as genuflexions, prostrations, &c.; and lastly, exterior goods, of which he is the master, and which are offered to God, either immediately, as in the sacrifices of the old law, or remotely, as when they are given to his ministers, considered as such.

10. Devotion is a readiness of the soul in all those things that belong to the divine service. Prayer is a raising of the mind to God with the petition for things suitable. Adoration is the humbling of ourselves both in mind and body before the sovereign majesty of God. Sacrifice is the supreme exterior homage paid to God, in acknowledgment of his sovereignty instituted by him. Gifts, first-fruits, and tithes are offered to God in his ministers. A vow is an act, by which we promise and consecrate to God any good work, which we afterwards acquit ourselves of. A lawful oath is an act by which, compelled by urgent necessity, we with the highest reverence call God, as the sovereign truth, to witness some truth certainly known by us. Adjuration is an act, by which we earnestly ask of God some good for our spiritual ad-

vantage and for his divine honour, by his infinite goodness and mercy, by the passion of his Son, &c. The praise of God is an act, by which we celebrate him for his infinite perfection and wonderful works. Gratitude is the returning of thanks to God for his benefits.

11. But all our actions and other virtues may be made the subjects of this virtue, by being offered to God, and performed for the motives of religion. Religion ought to be the principle of our whole lives: we ought only to live and breathe to God. Hence, alms-deeds, and all other virtues, will, by being offered to God as homages to acknowledge and honour his supreme excellence, have, beside their own merit, that of religion. Whence St. James, i. 27: "Religion, clean and undefiled before God and the Father, is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their tribulation, and to keep one's self unspotted from this world." The same motive will make our ordinary actions, every step we take, and every motion of our heart, perfect sacrifices to honour God, to procure new graces, and obtain fresh crowns of glory in his everlasting inheritance. "If eternal life were to be sold," says St. Clement of Alexandria, speaking of this virtue of religion (Paræn. ad Gentes), "at how great a price should we offer to buy it!" How fervent ought this reflection to make us in the practice of the acts of religion, to honour God more on earth, and to enlarge our happiness and love for an eternity of bliss! Every act of religion will be the greater, as it is performed with the greater sentiments of the annihilation of ourselves before God, and of glorifying his sovereign majesty and greatness with all our affections, and with our whole strength.

12. God is not content with mere exterior worship, as bowing, kneeling, &c. "True adorers shall adore the Father in spirit and truth."—John, iv. 23. Without this interior, all the exterior is hypocrisy and farce. "Where that interior charity is wanting, whatever is done outwardly in sacrifices and prayers is useless, and like stage-representations: and God is provoked to anger, not appeased by them," says St. Austin, Enchir. "God is a spirit, and they that adore him must adore him in spirit and in truth."—John, iv. 24. He has given us a spiritual soul, only that we might know him, and pay him a spiritual homage. This the sacrifice of the new law peculiarly points out,—to this the exterior sacrifices of the old law directed.

God made this virtue of religion the basis of all his laws to man, and the first of his commandments. "Thou shalt adore the Lord

thy God, and shalt serve him alone."—Matt. iv. 10. Ah! was it necessary that God should command me, by an express, positive law, to adore him? Are not the voice of nature, and his essential dependence on and infinite obligations to his Creator, and his Lord's infinite sovereignty, sufficient to move a rational creature to comply with this first of all duties?

## DISCOURSE VII.

### ON FAITH.

1. FAITH is a theological virtue, by which a soul believes firmly all the truths that God has revealed, upon the motive of his divine revelation. It is a theological virtue, because its immediate object is God, or his divine revelation. Its principal function is to honour God as the first truth. His holy providence could have given us a clear view of himself and his mysteries in this mortal life; but then we should not by such a knowledge have made him so honourable an acknowledgment of believing him to be the sovereign truth, and of humbling and subjecting our reason to it, which is the homage we pay him by an act of faith. Reason is a man's greatest prerogative; it is by it he principally excels brutes and the rest of this lower creation. He is himself sensible of this, and, therefore, makes this privilege the greatest object of his inordinate pride. We, by faith, make to God the entire sacrifice of it, confessing that our lights are all darkness, and annihilating them when God speaks. This is a great and an honourable homage, which we pay to God, as often as we repeat any act of faith. It is likewise a humiliation of ourselves before God, and a sacrifice of that which is most noble in us. "Blessed are they who have not seen and have believed."

2. Faith is the belief of truths that are proposed to us with some obscurity. "Faith is the substance of things to be hoped for, the evidence of things that appear not."—Heb. xi. 1. It is called the substance and the evidence, because by its firmness and certainty we already possess and hold the goods to come: but then, it is of goods which are yet absent and invisible to us. "Hope, that is seen, is not hope. For what a man seeth, why doth he hope for?"—Rom. viii. 24. If it were grounded upon evidence, how would it be free? Where would be its merit, its

excellence, or its sacrifice? Therefore, has Almighty God been pleased to conduct us by authority; but by an authority the most certain and irrefragable; by an authority which reason itself commands us to subject our understanding to; reason which meets with mysteries in every object on earth, and work of nature. "You calumniate invisible things," said St. Hilary to the Arians; "I ask of you a reason of those that are visible. Content to own your ignorance in your own concerns, you are insolently curious and presumptuous in those of God." When the heretic Eunomius pretended to fathom the bottomless abyss of the divinity, St. Basil desired him, before he put such a question, to explain to him only the nature of an ant. Ep. 168, p. 629. Nothing is more worthy of the infinite greatness of God, than that his mysteries are incomprehensible to us, and above our reason, though never contrary to it. And nothing can be more just than that we should believe the divine revelation. We are governed by authority and belief in natural things, when we do not see them, as St. Austin elegantly shows in an express book on this subject, L. de Fide Rerum, t. 6, p. 145; and shall we not acquiesce in the assurance of eternal truth? The testimony of God suffices to silence all human reasoning, and to stop its idle curiosity. St. Chrysostom, having explained how Christ is co-eternal with the Father, cries out: "You will say, how can this be, seeing he is the Son? We speak of God, and do you ask, how? And do you not fear and tremble? If any one were to ask you, how the soul and body reunited will enjoy eternal life, you would laugh at the question; because our mind is not to inquire, but to believe, and not to examine a thing, the demonstration whereof is the power of him who affirms it. Why do you search into things which cannot be fathomed? Why do you inquire into matters which do not fall under our faculties or inquiry? Search the original of the rays of the sun; you cannot discover it, yet bear the weakness of your understanding. Why are you bold and rash in greater things?" &c.—St. Chrysos. Hom. 7. at 6. in Joan. ed. Montf. pp. 45, 46, t. 8. "Nothing is worse than to pretend to measure divine things by reason," says the same St. Chrysostom, Hom. 2. in 2 Tim. p. 69. "For so a man surely falls from the foundation of faith, is thrown afloat, and forsaken by the light. If a man, who would fix his sight upon the sun, will be so far from being able to see it, that he will lose his own sight, and also suffer much; far more will he do so, who boldly seeks to fix his eyes on the eternal light of God, and presumes to attain it by mortal reason." See him again,

Hom. 13. in Matt. p. 175, 3, 7. "It is, then, the essential property of faith to bring into captivity every understanding unto the obedience of Christ;" 2 Cor. x. 5; "and its chief disposition is humble simplicity, which far excels, in the eyes of God, all the pompous pride of philosophers, from whose hearts he conceals his holy truths and mysteries, revealing them only to the little ones."—Luke, x. 21. The reward of this obscure belief is the clear vision of God and of his great truths in the revelation of his glory.

3. The assent of faith, though obscure, is most certain, and more so than the clear truths or first principles of natural evidence. For, though the assent in these be most certain in the order of nature, that of faith is more firm, being in a supernatural order; produced by grace in the soul, and grounded more immediately on the sovereign truth of God. For, though reason and evidence draw all their truth and certainty from him, their author, yet it is more impossible that God should deceive by himself, or by his own direct revelation, than by another, which is a means instituted by him indeed, but distinct from himself. "We have the more firm prophetical word: whereunto you do well to attend, as to a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in our hearts."—2 Peter, i. 19. The motive of faith is the word, or testimony and assurance of God, who is the supreme truth, and can neither deceive nor be deceived. All other things we believe, either upon the relation of our senses, which are often fallacious, or of our reason, so weak, short-sighted, and subject to illusion. But the certainty of faith is of a superior order, being founded on a higher motive, viz., on God himself. And where his testimony is sufficiently applied, it is a criminal infidelity not to receive it with a firm assent; for to hesitate, or to entertain the least deliberate doubt upon any one article, is entirely to lose the gift of faith, and to become an infidel. All the articles of faith resting upon the same motive, the testimony of God, to reject it knowingly in one is to reject it in all, and to believe by fancy, not by the rule of God's authority and revelation. "You who in the gospel believe what you please, and do not believe what you please, believe yourselves rather than the gospel," says St. Austin, l. 17. contra Faust. c. 3, t. 8, p. 307. Faith is always one, always the same, always unchangeable, as Tertullian observes (l. de Veland. Virginibus), and the same in all ages and times from Christ to the end of the world; for the Church cannot add one tittle to what Christ taught her.

4. The assent of faith is solely founded on the divine revela-

tion, or the unerring testimony of God manifesting itself to us. Other conditions go before, and remove obstacles out of the heart, apply the revelation to us, and banish all rashness, or levity in our assent. These are called the motives of credibility; but are not properly dispositions to an act, which is supernatural. The principal of these are the evidence of the ancient prophecies; the confirmation of incontestible miracles; the sanctity of its sublime doctrine, and of many of its followers; the wonderful manner of its propagation, with the destruction of vice and idolatry; the troops of martyrs, who must have known its truth, especially the first of them, and who sealed it with their blood; the testimony of so many great men, doctors, philosophers, anchorets, virgins, &c., whose admirable lives alone must remove all possibility of doubt. Such a cloud of witnesses of every age, sex, and nation, persons of such great learning, probity, and capacity, who could not but be assured of what they testified, must shut the mouths of the most hardened unbelievers.

5. Faith is a supernatural virtue, and a special gift of God, infused into our souls by a particular grace, as St. Austin has composed whole books to show, and as the Church has defined in several councils against the Semi-pelagians, who ascribed the beginning of faith to ourselves. "By grace you are saved through faith. For it is a gift of God."—Eph. xi. 8. "Unto you it is given for Christ, not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him."—Phil. i. 29. "Not that we are sufficient to think anything of ourselves: but our sufficiency is from God."—2 Cor. iii. 5. "If we are not able to think, certainly we are not able to believe as from ourselves," as St. Austin reasons, l. de Præd. s. 35, c. 2. That virtue, which is the seed and the foundation of all supernatural actions, virtues, and life, must necessarily be itself a supernatural gift, and consequently cannot be acquired by the industry of nature without grace. "Whose heart the Lord opened, to attend to those things which were said by Paul."—Acts, xvi. 14. Hence, there can be no true faith in the devils or damned souls, which are stripped of gifts and graces, and retain no virtue, though they believe by the conviction of what they feel.

6. Faith is the foundation and beginning of a supernatural life. It is the root from which all supernatural virtues and good works, all the seeds of immortality, rise and are nourished. By it we receive the power of being made sons of God. John, i. 12. By it we are born of God. 1 John, v. 1. Christ attributes to it the remission of sins; the power of working the most stupendous

miracles is also its effect. Matt. xxi.; Mark, xi.; Luke, xvii., &c. Abraham was justified through faith. All the patriarchs and saints pleased God, did such wonders on earth, and were saved by it. Read the enumeration made by St. Paul, Heb. xi. For charity and all other virtues are pushed up and draw their increase from it. We admire a great tree, its bulky trunk, its spreading branches, its numberless flowers, and delicious fruit; and we see that all this wonderful glory of the earth is produced and nourished from its root. So it is in regard to faith; which is the plant from the seed, or rather the root, that produces and continually feeds all true virtues and sanctity of life. "Faith is the solid foundation of all virtues," says St. Ambrose in Ps. 40. And the same father cries out: "O faith, richer than all treasures! more excellent than all qualifications! more healing and sovereign than all physicians!"—l. de Virginibus, c. 3. We admire the confidence, the zeal, the charity of the saints; but let us remember, that the ardour of their faith gave to those virtues their birth and all their vigour. We are strangers to those happy effects, because we are so weak in faith.

Faith is the light which directs us through the dark paths of this life to a glorious eternity; it was prefigured by that pillar of fire by night, and of a cloud by day, which conducted the Israelites through the desert into the land of promise; for it is a great light, but mixed with darkness and obscurity, and points out to us the happy land of the living.

7. The absolute necessity of holy faith unto life everlasting again recommends it. Without this virtue we love only the earth, we act only on earthly motives; we know only the earth and its false gods; we live only for the earth, and are, in our works, affections, and thoughts, altogether earthly. Faith translates us to a new life, and directs our hearts and actions to new and more noble objects, and makes all our works and affections supernatural, heavenly, and agreeable sacrifices to God. Unless we know and love God as the author of grace, and refer our actions to him in this quality, none of them can merit that glory, which is supernatural, and which can never be obtained but by virtues and acts of the same supernatural order. Hence, though an infidel may perform some moral good actions, as of alms out of fraternal compassion, or for God as the author of nature, he can do nothing profitable to eternal life without faith. "He that believeth not shall be condemned."—Mark, xvi. 16. "Without faith it is impossible to please God. For he that cometh to God

must believe that he is, and is a rewarder to them that seek him."—Heb. xi. 6. The apostle makes this the principal subject of his Epistles to the Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians. "The just man lives from faith."—Heb. ii. 2.

8. Hence, we learn the enormity of sins against faith, which, by destroying it in the soul, destroy the very foundation of justification and salvation. Such is the crime of infidelity, which is a denying the whole system of the gospel revelation, one of the most enormous and most pernicious of all sins, as it entirely separates a man from God, and from all true knowledge of him, his mysteries, and his holy law; though infidelity is not of itself a sin, if it be invincible, that is, if a person could never come to the knowledge of God's revelation. Such a one, indeed, cannot be saved without divine faith; to which either God will bring him, or he will be damned for his original and actual sins. A similar crime is heresy, which is an obstinate error in matters of faith. For he, who obstinately denies one point, loses entirely faith, and believes the rest only by human persuasion. This is a sin next akin to infidelity. It is reckoned amongst the deadly sins: Gal. v. 19, 20; 2 Peter, ii. 1; 1 John, ii. 18; 2 John, 17; Jude, 12, 13. Saint Irenæus, l. 3, c. 3, writes: "The apostles and their disciples dreaded this evil so much, that they would never have any commerce, even in words only, with those who had adulterated the truth. John, the disciple of the Lord, in Ephesus, going to bathe, as soon as he spied Cerinthus in it, leaped out of the bath without bathing, saying, he was afraid lest the bath should fall, whilst Cerinthus, the enemy of faith, was within." And Polycarp, his chief disciple, when Marcion one day met and asked him, if he did not know him, answered, "I know you to be the devil's eldest son." The celebrated Middleton is indeed angry at this relation, but is not able to discredit it. Nor is it stronger than the apostle's words: "If any man come to you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into the house, nor salute him."—2 John, 10. "What doctrine," says the ancient Vincent of Lerins, "but the Catholic, the universal, that which remains one and the same through all the successions of ages, by the unspotted tradition of the truth?" St. Paul says: "A man that is a heretic avoid, after the first and second admonition."—Tit. iii. 10. But, as heresy is an obstinate error, this crime is not incurred, if the error be invincible. Whence, St. Austin writes thus: "No one can doubt but that we are to give an account of our faith as well as of our practice, and that a wilful corruption of it,

which has not the plea of invincible ignorance, must be a crime."

9. As a gardener gives his principal application to the roots of his plants, so the first care of a Christian ought to be to cultivate most diligently in his soul holy faith, the root of all virtues conducing to eternal life; for, the stronger and deeper and more lively this is, the larger branches and better fruit will be produced from it. It was by the perfection of their faith that the saints were able to remove mountains. "By faith they conquered kingdoms, wrought justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, recovered strength from weakness, became valiant in battle, put armies to flight."—Heb. xi. 33, 34. If a worldly spirit, disorder, and sin now reign so much among Christians, this calamity is owing to the want of faith. For, though they believe firmly, yet they are not penetrated with the great truths which they believe, and they are strangers to the impressions which they ought to produce in their hearts.

How is our faith to be strengthened, and the source of so great evils to be remedied? The first means is, to beg humbly of God the gift of perfect faith; for it must be his grace. We must, therefore, pray with the apostles: "Increase our faith"—Luke, xvii. 5; and with the father of the boy brought to Jesus, possessed by a dumb spirit, who cried out with tears: "I believe, Lord! help my unbelief."—Mark, ix. 23. It is God who must open our heart to believe, as he did that of Lydia. Acts, xvi. 14.

We must, secondly, prepare ourselves to receive it with perfect humility, simplicity, and docility of heart. "For the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men."—1 Cor. i. 25. It is always pride that begets apostates and heretics, and makes men curiously pry into what is above them. We stand not in need of curiosity after Christ's testimony, nor of inquiry after the Gospel, says Tertullian, l. de Præscr. If we are molested with temptations of infidelity, we must raise our hearts calmly to Christ by a firm act of faith and prayer, (*e. g.*) saying with Hugh, of St. Victor: "Lord, if I am deceived, you yourself must have deceived me; for my faith is recommended by those signs which can only come from you." Under the temptations, we must carefully avoid entering into any disputation with others, or within our own minds; for the devil is an artful disputant; and we, at such times, labour under a bias.

Our arms must, then, be vigorous resistance and prayer. When our minds are calm, we may apply them with prudent advice to the proper motives.

10. Repeating frequent acts of faith is another essential means. Every virtue is strengthened by the fervent repetition of its acts. So must faith. By them, our hearts must relish more and more its mysteries, and grow daily stronger in faith. 1 Peter, v. "In which shield they may extinguish all the fiery darts of the enemy."

Moreover, actual faith is an indispensable homage which we owe to God, and a necessary condition of salvation, as all Christians agree. "You who fear God, believe him."—Eccl. ii. Hence, divines unanimously teach, that an omission of acts of faith, hope, or charity, is a mortal sin; First, when children attain the use of reason, the sacrifice and first-fruits of which they are bound to make to God by the exercise of the three theological virtues, so that the omission be not of any moral delay. Hence, we see the particular obligation of parents and pastors to take care, that children before that time should have learned the chief mysteries of faith, especially the unity and trinity of God, and the incarnation of the Son of God, and also to recite their prayers, and with the greatest attention their age is capable of, that they may direct the first dawning of their reason to adore God.

Secondly, these acts oblige, immediately after any sin against faith, &c., to repair the injury done to God by it, and restore him our hearts. Thirdly, when any dangerous temptation against faith assaults the soul; and, fourthly, in any probable danger. For then a man is most strictly obliged to turn himself to God, to make him the sacrifice of himself by these supernatural virtues, and to arm himself with the shield of faith against the raging enemy. "This is the victory which overcomes the world, our faith."—1 John, v.

Moreover, it is a most advisable devotion always to form such acts with the greatest fervour, when we prepare ourselves to receive any of the sacraments; and on all Sundays and principal festivals; both to honour God by this indispensable homage of his divine worship; to sanctify our souls, which the exercise of these virtues does above any others; and to excite and nourish devotion in our hearts.

There is farther a strict precept, that these acts be so frequent and continual, that our whole life may be influenced and governed by actual faith, that a man may live by faith. Rom. i. 17. For

these are to be the vital acts of his spiritual supernatural life, as breathing is to the body. Whence the faithful are to be admonished never to forget them in their morning and evening devotions. "Faith is the beginning of human salvation. Without this, no one can come to the society of the children of God; because, without it, no one obtains the grace of justification in this life, nor shall possess eternal life in that to come" (says St. Austin, Serm. 38. de Temp.); and the fathers call faith the root of justice and perfection.

11. The conditions which are to accompany our acts of faith are, first, that we profess explicitly the firm belief of some supernatural truths or mysteries, as, in the first place, that God is our supernatural end, and the author of grace and eternal glory. This fundamental article, with that of our redemption through Christ, ought to be assented to explicitly in all acts of faith; other chief articles ought explicitly to enter into them sometimes, as on the effects of the sacraments, when we receive them, or by summing up the principal mysteries that are revealed to us, which we do by reciting the creeds. We are to profess an implicit belief of all the other articles of our holy faith, and of whatever God has revealed to us by his holy Church, which he has established as the pillar and ground-work of his truth, and the depository of his sacred mysteries and holy word. For we receive them from Christ, not as his apostles did immediately from his own mouth, but by the channel of his Church. This we may consider in two distinct capacities; first, as it is merely an illustrious body of men, deserving credit by their succession through all ages, their sanctity, learning, sufferings, martyrdom, &c. Considered thus, it is an authority to heathens and infidels, leading them to the assent in our holy faith, and ranked among those arguments, which we call motives of credibility, that make infidelity inexcusable even to reason and human prudence. "Thy testimonies are made exceedingly credible."—Ps. xcii. 5. In this capacity the Church recommends to us the holy Scriptures and all the other objects of our faith, but is not itself one of them, being only an introduction to faith. It is considered by faith, when it is embraced in a second capacity, viz., as the unerring spouse of Christ, and the depository, sure guide, and teacher of all his holy truths, which it received from him and proposes to us, to be assented to by us, without any danger of erring, as she is under the guidance and influence of his divine Spirit, who has given us his assurance, that he will always direct and preserve

this holy Church, which he himself planted with his own hand, against all the powers of hell, to the end of the world, that it be always a safe pasture of truth and salvation to our souls, and that his holy worship shall be never defiled or banished from amongst men, whom he redeemed. We may consider the Church in either or both of these capacities, especially the latter, when we assent to all that Christ has revealed to us by it.

12. Another essential condition in all acts of faith is the motive on which we found our assent to them, which must be no other than the divine revelation or testimony, which is the act of the unerring will of God, manifesting his mysteries to us by some exterior known sign, as by prophecy. This revelation is applied to us by the external motives of credibility, and the testimony of the Church; but none of those external motives are the ground of our faith. Its assent is solely and firmly grounded on the divine testimony or revelation. Hence, to believe on the testimony of men, or even of miracles, would be only a human faith, and a natural assent. These natural motives may show us the revelation; but divine faith grounds its assent solely on the divine authority. This all Christians ought to be carefully instructed in: and for this purpose it is proper that the motive should be sometimes expressed in the acts of faith, and that we believe, because God has revealed it, who is the sovereign truth, and can neither deceive nor be deceived.

Although acts of faith are necessarily implied in every attentive prayer, we ought to make them often expressly, as by saying the Creed; in the mean time dilating our hearts in pious affections of adoration, love, thanksgiving, petition, &c. Or we may sometimes recite the summary of the chief articles of our faith, with acts of adoration, sometimes of love, of supplication, or the like, repeated in our hearts at each article.

13. The fruits of the Holy Ghost contribute exceedingly to the perfection of faith, especially spiritual science and wisdom, which teach us to understand, relish, and penetrate heavenly truths, piety, and the fear of the Lord; which are the effects of mortification, and assiduous prayer, and meditation. The soul, by receiving these gifts, lights, and affections more abundantly, and by advancing in humility and simplicity of heart before God, grows every day more perfect in holy faith. The practice of good works is likewise a necessary and great means to increase our faith, as the disciples going to Emmaus were enlightened by doing. The exercise of virtue perfects the will to be docile to

faith, and removes the obstacles with which self-love and creatures fill it. The understanding is prepared for faith; both the powers of the soul are employed in an assent of faith; the will to command, and the understanding to form it. The understanding, I say, is prepared for faith, by considering the motives of credibility: for the study of these motives in a spirit, not of distrust and curiosity, but of humility and piety, will not diminish but increase the merit of our faith. We meditate on them only through a sincere desire to perfect this holy faith in our hearts, and out of a great love of its mysteries, "which fills us with peace and joy in believing." And though faith be obscure, yet the motives that lead us to it have a sufficient evidence, and show that the testimonies of the Lord are most worthy of our belief.

14. The marks of a great faith, which are likewise acts tending to increase it, are a high esteem and love of it; an ardent zeal to defend and propagate it; the greatest abhorrence of heresy or voluntary error in it; a perfect and joyful submission to the Church; a firm hope and confidence in God, like that of Abraham, who, ready by faith to sacrifice his son, still trusted firmly in the promises of God—Heb. ii. 7; a perfect charity and the most fervent practice of good works; a faithful observance of God's commandments. How do our lives deny the practical points of our religion, the contempt of the world, of riches, and pleasures, the love of crosses and humiliations, and the like? Are not we, in our maxims and manners, a scandal to Christianity? A certain lady presented herself to St. Francis de Sales, to be received into his order of the Visitation, and begged he would receive the abjuration of her heresy. The saint was surprised; but she answered: "I have always, indeed, professed the Catholic faith, but only by halves; for, till now, I always believed riches and pleasures a happiness."

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## DISCOURSE VIII.

### ON THE QUALITIES OF FAITH, AND ON THE CATECHISM.

1. Faith is not lost by mortal sin. This virtue still remains in sinners, who have not renounced it by apostacy. But it is in them a dead faith, or, as divines say, a faith without its form or soul, which is charity; a faith which will never save men, as St. James

has expressly asserted against one who pretended, from the great commendation which St. Paul had given faith, that it sufficed alone to salvation: but he meant an active faith, a faith that worketh by charity—Gal. v. 6. For he expressly declares: "If I should have all faith, so that I should remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing."—1 Cor. xiii. 2. And St. James: "What shall it profit, if a man say he hath faith, but hath not works? Shall faith be able to save him?"—James, ii. 14. He proves that Abraham and the other patriarchs were justified, not by faith alone, but by a faith which produceth good works. It is by them that we give the testimony or proof of our faith. "Show me thy faith without works, and I will show thee, by works, my faith."—James, v. 18. He compares such an inactive faith to the fruitless knowledge which the devils have of God. "Thou believest that there is one God. The devils also believe and tremble."—James, v. 19. He calls it a dead faith: "Even as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead."—James, v. 26. Faith without works is, as it were, a lamp without oil, says St. Cyril of Jerusalem. St. Bernard writes of it: "You offer to God a dead gift. Do you honour him with a stinking present? do you please him by becoming the murderer of your own faith?"—Serm. 24. in Cant. And St. Cyril of Alexandria: "If any one, after baptism, returns to sin, he, as it were, murders his faith within his own breast."—In Malachi, c. 4, p. 43.

2. Faith is the principle of all supernatural actions. Infidels may exercise, without it, certain moral virtues, which may deserve some temporal recompence in this world, as St. Austin says, de Civit. Dei, l. 5, c. 12 and 15. God gave to the Romans the empire of the world, in reward for their ancient parsimony and virtue. But they can never merit any reward in heaven; for faith alone can raise them to a supernatural order, and to the dignity of meriting eternal life. On the other hand, faith without good works will only serve to condemn us much more severely, as it makes our transgressions more criminal and more inexcusable. It is in vain we call ourselves the spiritual seed of Abraham, or the disciples of Christ, if we practise not his precepts, and are not governed by his spirit. We dishonour God, disgrace the sacred name we bear, and profane the holy religion we profess. We owe both to God, to our neighbour, and to ourselves, a suitable sanctity of manners, and a life conformable to our faith. God has done us the high honour, and shown us the unspeakable mercy of

choosing us to be members of his Church. Gratitude and obedience oblige us in a particular manner to live as his sons and servants, that he may not be offended by those who are, most of all others, bound to love and honour him. "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."—Matt. v. 16. We are bound to glorify God by our conduct and actions, which, if we neglect, we dishonour him by usurping the sacred title of belonging to his family. A certain great prince said to an unworthy relation, that he begged he would either change his name or his manners, at least not to affect his illustrious family with the infamy of his vices. So does God reproach Catholics, who are such in name only.

3. Such Catholics, moreover, disgrace their religion and ruin their neighbours' souls. Every son of the Church owes to it a zeal, and his best prayers, endeavours, and labours for its exaltation and propagation, for which he professes himself ready to suffer all manner of torments and death. How base would it be for a son to fight against his own mother, and this while he professed the most dutiful and sacred piety and obedience! This crime wicked livers in the Church are guilty of. They injure, by their manners, that Church of which they are members, and render fruitless, in regard to many souls, all the labours of many apostolic preachers; the pernicious influence of their example being far more prevailing than the contrary zeal of holy pastors. They are unnatural sons, who tear out the bowels of their own mother; they are unfaithful soldiers, who insult the banners which they have the honour to carry; they are ungrateful miscreants, who expose their father's mysteries, with which they are entrusted, to the jest, raillery, and blasphemies of his enemies.

We owe this edification of our manners, not only to the Church, but also to the souls of all our neighbours. The force of example in all things is absolutely incredible; and every one is to watch over all his actions, lest he become in any of them a scandal or stumbling-block to his neighbour. We are all, as it were, lights placed in the candlesticks of the Church; we are a spectacle to all with whom we converse, and we diffuse an odour, either to life or to death. Did Christians universally practise and live up to the sanctity of their religion, there would not remain one unbeliever in the world. The beauty, the harmony, and the lustre of the Church, resulting from the virtue of all its members, would be so strong and attractive, that no obstinacy would be able to resist it. The heathens of the Indies openly allege our lives as an

excuse of their infidelity; and our erring neighbours, who regard our actions more than our words, take occasion from our manners to reproach our religion,—unjustly, indeed; but woe to him through whom this scandal comes! We owe this duty to ourselves and to our souls.

4. Wilful infidelity is a prodigy of obstinacy and blindness, as it resists the strongest motives and lights of reason, and this for human respect, or for the sake of singularity and pride, without having any plausible arguments to allege. But it is another prodigy, that any man should believe, yet detain truth in injustice, and live like a heathen. He stands self-condemned, and pronounces as many sentences against himself as he makes professions of his faith, which serve only to aggravate the ingratitude and malice of his guilt. Surprising! that the divine judgments, which he believes, should not awaken him, nor the knowledge of his obligations make some impression upon his heart: that he should, with his eyes open, precipitate himself into so frightful a gulf. All our actions are seeds of eternity. The least of them will not lose its reward (Matt. x. 42), but will shine to endless eternities.—Dan. xxii. "The kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent bear it away."—Matt. xi. 12. "What a man has sown, that he shall also reap."—Gal. vi. 8. "He who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he who sows in abundance shall reap also in benedictions of plenty."—2 Cor. ix. 6. If a merchant were placed in such circumstances that he could acquire every moment new estates, how earnest would he be to lose no part of that precious time? How would he regret even the hours necessarily lost in sleep? "Alas!" cries out St. Bonaventure, Serm. 3. de Ascens. p. 341, "with what pains does the countryman manure and till the ground for the fruit of one year! and we labour for eternal crowns, yet are slothful." If any one should tell us, and we believed him, that a great treasure was hidden in our garden, we would certainly use all our endeavours to find it out; and if we did not, it would be a sign that we did not seriously believe it. We may say the same with regard to heaven or hell. Was our faith such as it ought to be, we would not neglect this affair as we do. Nor should we snarl at Providence, and turn ourselves into all the postures of impatience, when any affliction befalls us, if we truly looked upon it as a wise, holy order of our merciful God, and a seed of immense glory.

5. We are bound not only inwardly to believe, but also exteriorly to profess our faith, placing our glory in it. "He that

shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him the Son of man shall be ashamed, when he shall come in his majesty."—Luke, ix. 26. "With the heart we believe unto justice; but with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."—Rom. x. 10. This our public profession is glorious and honourable to the divine Majesty, and an act of justice we owe to the truth. It is an exterior act of religion and faith. In these sentiments we are to recite our Creed in public prayers with the greatest attention and reverence. But prudence is here necessary, for we ought not to publish God's sacred truths, where it would only expose them to the raillery of unbelievers, and give an indiscreet occasion to their blasphemies. But there are two cases in which we are obliged to make a public profession of our faith. First, if God's honour, secondly, if our neighbours require it. The first happens, if a Christian be called upon by any public authority, whether just or unjust, to give an account of his religion. For to be then silent, would be to be ashamed of Christ before men, to rob him of his honour, and to prefer the world to him. And this is clear from the doctrine of the Church and the practice of the martyrs. The second case happens, if another be in danger of denying his faith, unless he be publicly encouraged or instructed, or of concealing his religion, whereby some scandal would be given to others, or an occasion to the infidels of more boldly insulting the faith. When nothing of this occurs, it is lawful to conceal our faith among its adversaries, provided it be not in any ways denied, or anything done even tacitly against it. It is likewise lawful to fly in a persecution, unless a pastor be obliged to reside for the comfort of his flock, &c., as appears from Christ's express words, Matt. x. 23. He himself fled into Egypt; and again, when the Jews were going to stone him. St. Peter fled out of prison, and St. Paul out of Damascus. Read St. Athanasius's apology for his flight, and St. Austin, Ep. 228, ib. 180.

6. It is always a grievous apostacy to deny a man's faith by words or signs. It is an enormous crime even to use any such dissimulation, by which others will think a person has denied his faith, which was the sin of the *Libellatici* condemned by the Roman clergy, and by St. Cyprian, who obtained from the judges false certificates that they had sacrificed. He interpretatively denies his faith, who does anything which is in itself lawful, but which is regarded by the persecutors as a denial of our faith, or is exacted by them in contempt of our holy religion. All lies in things in which religion is essentially concerned, though never so

small in themselves, are grievous mortal sins; such as any false quotation of holy Scripture, any lie or forgery about a miracle, relics of saints, &c. "Faith requires in us a twofold duty, of the heart and of the mouth; nor can we be saved, unless we profess our faith by our mouth, which we carry in our hearts," says St. Austin, lib. de Fide et Symb. c. 1.

7. Faith must have three qualities: 1. It must be firm, never admitting the least doubt or wavering in any point; and so constant that no worldly flatteries, pleasures, or prosperity may ever weaken it, nor threats or persecutions shake it. Dangers, torments, or death must not be able to shake it, as it filled the patriarchs and martyrs with confidence and joy under the most affrighting trials; triumphing in them over fires and the sword. By it, the first Christians "received with joy the plunder of their goods, knowing that they had a better and a more lasting substance."—Heb. x. 34. By it, and for its sake, the ancient servants of God "were stoned, cut asunder, tempted, put to death by the sword; wandering about in sheep-skins and goat-skins, being in want, distressed, afflicted, of whom the world was not worthy; wandering in deserts, in mountains, and in depths and caves of the earth."—Heb. xi. 37 and 38.

8. A second property of faith is, that it be entire, receiving every article which the Catholic Church teaches. He who wilfully errs in any one point destroys his assent of faith in his whole belief; because he rejects the motive, upon which the whole rests, viz., the divine authority of revelation. Thus, as one mortal sin destroys charity, so one obstinate error destroys the whole fabric of faith; but not an error of ignorance, which is excusable or invincible, and which is accompanied with the pious motion of true faith, and submission of the will to its holy motives. Hence, obstinate or wilful heretics, or infidels, may have a natural, human, or historical belief of any points of the Christian revelation, grounded on its motives of credibility, or on their own fancy, which chooses truth just as in other things it chooses error; but they have no divine or theological faith, which is a supernatural virtue, grace, and gift of God, infused by him into our souls, and residing habitually in us by his assistance. Infants receive this habit of faith in baptism, by which they are made faithful or believers before they are capable of actual faith, which habit is lost only by actual apostacy or heresy. The adult may receive this habit or permanent gift of faith before baptism; but it can be communicated to us only by a supernatural gift or infusion of God.

9. The third quality of faith is, that it be active. For, if it be barren of its fruit, which are good works, it cannot be profitable to those who have it, and will only serve to condemn them, and is called by St. James a carcase without the soul. It was a lively faith which drew so many great men into deserts; made others prefer cells and poverty to thrones; encouraged others joyfully to condemn themselves to the most austere penitential lives, and made the martyrs embrace cheerfully racks and gibbets; and all the saints exult in their crosses and humiliations, as having found in them the most inestimable treasures. St. Serapion, the Sindonite, having given all to the poor, even his clothes, except one thin linen garment, and a book of the gospels, was asked on a very cold day why he was so thinly clad? To which, showing his book of the gospel, he answered: "This has stripped me." If we look into ourselves we shall often find our faith very weak, imperfect, and inactive. We must study earnestly to strengthen and increase it by prayer, meditation, and the heroic practice of virtue. The path of the just is a light growing till perfect day; that is, our faith is increasing, till it leads us to its term and everlasting recompence, the clear vision of God in glory. But it carries along with it also a present blessing, filling our hearts with a perpetual feast, a continual fund of overflowing comfort, joy, peace, and firm hope, which is our present support. "Now, the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope, and in the power of the Holy Ghost."—Rom. x. 13.

10. The indispensable necessity and incomparable advantages of actual faith show the instruction of all persons in the Christian Doctrine, or Catechism, to be the strictest and first of all obligations. Without the actual faith and supernatural knowledge of God, as the justifier of our souls, and our eternal rewarder, no one ever could obtain justification or salvation, either under the law of nature, or the Mosaic dispensation; nor, moreover, without a faith in him as our Redeemer from sins, though the knowledge of the means of this redemption was not in all equally explicit. Since the promulgation of the gospel, there is a like absolute necessity, that all distinctly know the Unity and Trinity of God, and the incarnation and death of the Son of God for our redemption, as the best divines teach and prove from holy Scripture and the tradition of the Church. "There is no other name but that of Christ, in which men may be saved."—Acts, iv. 12. All are struck by the serpent, and can be healed only by looking on, and believing in him. John, iii. 14. "He that doth not believe is

already judged, because he believeth not in the name of the only begotten Son of God."—John, iii. 18. In the conversion of infidels, it seems the most proper method to begin their instruction with the moral precepts of the law of nature, the last things, especially the future judgment, the Lord's Prayer, and lastly, to instruct them in the more sublime mysteries, for which they will be thus gradually prepared, as Lewis of Granada shows in his book "On the method of catechising among the Indians;" and this was followed by the fathers, as we see in their catechetical discourses still extant. But children, who already have faith, are to be instructed in the most essential articles first, which are these of which we speak, and without the distinct belief of which no adult is a Christian, or is capable of grace and justification, or of receiving worthily any sacrament. Whoever has received any in such a state of ignorance, even though it may seem inculpable, which is impossible in such persons, is bound to repeat the confessions he has made while in that state.

11. All are obliged to know and to understand the Apostles' Creed, with the articles which it contains, the commandments of God and the Church, the Lord's Prayer, and the sacraments, especially baptism, the blessed eucharist, and penance; as is often inculcated by the fathers and councils, and is sufficiently clear from the nature of our holy religion. All are bound to acquire a knowledge of these and other articles of our faith, more or less distinct, according to their state, profession, capacity, and other circumstances. But what has been said regards the most simple amongst the faithful. Those, that are capable, are obliged to instruct themselves more deeply in the mysteries of religion. Persons, who live in a voluntary ignorance of their religion, out of sloth and negligence, reject the holy knowledge of God and of his truths, and have the most terrible judgments to fear at his tribunal. Every one can find some time for trifling amusements, for idle conversation, or for temporal concerns. Shall that alone, which requires our whole attention, find no moments in the day or week? Parents are solicitous to procure for their children a temporal establishment and all necessaries for this life; and can they leave their souls destitute of the most essential spiritual assistance, an early instruction in the knowledge of God and their duty? Pastors tremble, if they hear that any of their flock died without the sacraments, yet are not always solicitous that all be perfectly instructed in their holy religion, though this neglect is far more pernicious and enormous a crime, and the most certain ruin

and damnation of those unhappy souls. We may call it the first duty of pastors in regard to their flock, of parents as to their children, and of masters towards their servants, that they be perfectly instructed in the Christian doctrine, and this early, as soon as children can speak, that they turn their tender hearts to God, when they first come to the use of reason.

12. The Catechism teaches the greatest, the most necessary, and the most sublime of all sciences. Without faith man is a riddle to himself. He finds himself in a state of darkness and misery, under the weight of sin; but knows not whence he came, whither he is going, or why he is placed here; or by what means he is to seek the remedies he stands in need of. Faith is the light from heaven, which discovers all this to him. It teaches him what the philosophers could never find out; and the poorest Christian idiot can answer satisfactorily, from his Catechism, those necessary important queries, which a Plato and an Aristotle knew nothing of. Faith teaches us our own happiness, and the means to attain it. It gives us the knowledge of God, and his most adorable mysteries; it is the participation of his secrets, which he communicates to us. The heathen philosophers boasted, that they would teach men happiness, and how to live well. But this he alone can discover to us, who came from heaven to be the light, the salvation, and the life of the world. Let them dispute on virtues and vices, dividing, defining, reasoning, sharply concluding, setting off their science with pompous words, who durst even cry out: Follow us, embrace our sect, if you desire to live well; yet they entered not by the gate; so they came to destroy, to sacrifice, to murder, as St. Austin says of them, Tr. 45. in Joan. The Christian revelation teaches us clearly all this; and shall we contemn its sacred school? Christ himself brought this doctrine from heaven. "The only begotten Son of God, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him to us."—John, i. 18. "The queen of the south came from the bounds of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon: behold more than Solomon here."—John, xii. 42. After God has sent his prophets and his only Son to teach us, wo to us if we neglect so great a salvation.

13. Some think it a mean office to instruct the ignorant and children in the rudiments of faith. But what employment can be more meritorious to ourselves, more proper to promote the honour of God or the salvation of our neighbour? By it we exercise the most excellent acts, both of charity and humility. Nothing more serviceable to our neighbour; nothing, as Pope Paul III. says, in

his first bulls of approbation of the Society of Jesus, more fruitful or profitable to his salvation: for to teach the rudiments of faith is to lay the foundation of Christianity; it is to plant the seeds of true piety in the manner in which they will be sure to produce the greatest fruit. Were but the great truths of religion pressed upon tender minds in a suitable manner, the impression they would make would be lasting and deep; and such children would, both by their example and reproofs, be a curb to vice in others, and, growing up, be a comfort to their parents, and a public benefit to the Church and State. A good catechist contributes more to the public peace and happiness than all the laws and magistrates. This employment, above all others, promotes the divine honour, in preserving tender souls from the early contagion of vice, and in helping to consecrate the first fruits of their hearts to God, and to lay a deep foundation of a virtuous life. St. Austin, St. Chrysostom, St. Cyril, and all the most eminent doctors and greatest popes and bishops, thought it a high branch of their duty to catechise. St. Paul said: "I am a debtor to the wise and unwise."—Rom. i. 14. What else did all the apostles travel over the whole world to do? "We become little ones in the midst of you, as if a nurse should cherish her children: so desirous of you, we would gladly impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own souls."—1 Thess. ii. 7, 8. "I am made all to all, that I may gain all." Nay, our Lord himself made this his great employment. "The spirit of the Lord is upon me; he hath sent me to preach the gospel to the poor."—Luke, iv. 18. The learned and holy doctor, John Gerson, that most celebrated Chancellor of the University of Paris, wrote a golden treatise "On drawing little ones to Christ." He employed, during all his life, a great part of his time in teaching children their Catechism; and after he returned from the Council of Constance, retiring to the city of Lyons, he assembled there every day all the children in the church of St. Paul, and taught them their Catechism. When he was near death, he caused all the children to meet together in the church, and to cry out and often repeat: "My God, my Creator, have pity on thy poor servant, John Gerson." Our Saviour himself testified his delight in assisting that innocent age, when he said: "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for such is the kingdom of God; and embracing them, and laying his hands upon them, he blessed them."—Mark, x. 14, 15. The popes, St. Pius V. anno 1571, Ex debito, Bullar. t. 2, p. 345, and Paul V. anno 1607, Ex credito, Bullar. t. 3, p. 223,

erected a confraternity of catechists to be united to those of St. Peter's in Rome, and granted forty days' indulgence to all that assist every time Catechism is given, even as hearers. Great care is to be taken that the catechists explain clearly the lessons, and that the children and others do not learn them merely as parrots, but understand them, and be penetrated with them; also that they conceive a great esteem for the Catechism, and a holy, ardent desire and emulation in it, the proof of a true thirst of virtue. When the Athenians had forbidden any citizen of Megara to set foot in Athens, under pain of death, one of that city, called Euclides, went in the night many miles disfigured, and lay hid in Athens during the day, returning the next night; and this he continued long to do, only that he might hear Socrates' lectures. Aul. Gellius, l. 6, c. 10. If a heathen was so earnest to learn a profane philosophy, what ought to be a Christian's zeal to hear the lessons of eternal life? If we desire to love God, the first step is, that we earnestly desire to know him and his holy will, which is done by the faith in which we are instructed in the Catechism. Children are to begin to learn its first articles as soon as they can speak, and to be always encouraged in learning it, by the assiduity and earnestness of parents and other teachers in instructing them; and the adult ought to make it their constant study.

## DISCOURSE IX.

### ON THE CREED.

1. The Creed is called in Latin *symbolum*, or distinctive mark of our faith; for *symbolum* signifies a sign or mark which a general gave his soldiers, by which they were known to belong to his troops. It was composed by the apostles before they dispersed themselves to carry the gospel to all nations. We find it in the fourth age used in all the churches of the world, with very small variations, less than we find in different copies of the Bible, which could never have been the case had it not been made by the apostles in the beginning by common consent. Tertullian gives it almost word for word, and calls it a rule of faith descending from the tradition of the apostles: De Præscr. c. 21, 13, 36; lib. contra Pr. c. 23. St. Irenæus quotes a considerable part of it, and calls it "the faith received from the apostles," lib. 1, c.

10. Lucifer of Cagliari quotes it to show what was the faith of the apostles, lib. de non Conveniendo cum Hæreticis, p. 161. St. Ambrose says: "Let us believe the symbol of the apostles, which the Roman Church always preserves unaltered."—Ep. ad Siricium Papam. Item Serm. ult. de Jejunio Eliæ, t. 3, p. 326. St. Jerome, Pope Celestin, Ep. 5. ad Nestorium, and all, ever since, have constantly attributed it to the apostles. This suffices to demonstrate it of apostolic institution, against the cavils of some modern pretended critics, against whom may be read Nat. Alexander. Hist. Eccles. Petit-didier, Remarques sur la Bibl. de Du Pin, t. 1, pp. 81-98. Ceillier, t. 1, p. 521.

Rufinus, in the fifth century, writes, in his exposition of the symbols: "Our ancestors assure us that the apostles, being about to disperse themselves to preach the gospel in different nations, being all assembled together, filled with the Holy Ghost, made this short summary or symbol of their future preaching, every one composing what he judged necessary to be inserted, and they decreed this rule to be given to the faithful. It was not written, but only learned by tradition, during the three first centuries. Whence, St. Jerome says of it: "In the symbol of our faith and hope, which, being delivered by the apostles, is not written in ink and paper, but on tables of the heart of flesh, the whole mystery of the Christian doctrine, after the confession of the Trinity, and of the unity of the Church, is concluded by the resurrection of the flesh." It is not to be wondered that different translations introduced some little variation in words of small importance, remarked by Rufinus. The opinion, which attributes an article to each apostle, is a groundless conjecture, though hazarded in an anonymous modern sermon; inter Serm. St. Aug. 115, de temp.

2. It has always been regarded by the Church as its mark, and the rule of its faith, as in civil wars every soldier carries some badge to show to what side he belongs, says Rufinus. It is the watchword of our contract or engagement with God in baptism, as St. Peter Chrysologus elegantly explains, Sermon 62, *On the Symbol.* The Christians were taught to recite it daily and on all occasions. St. Ambrose says: "We must repeat the symbol, particularly before day-break every day, as the seal of our heart, which we must also recall to mind in any fear or danger. For when is a soldier to be found without his badge or arms, either in the camp or in battle?"—Lib. 3. de Virginibus, t. 5, p. 550. St. Austin, Serm. de Symbol. ad Catec. c. 1, t. 6, p. 542, speaks

thus to the catechumens: "Receive, my children, the rule of faith, which is called the symbol; and, when you have received it, write it in your hearts, and recite it every day by yourselves. Before you sleep, before you go out, arm yourselves with your symbol. No one writes the symbol, that your memory may be your book." And Serm. 213, t. 5, p. 938: "The symbol is the short rule of faith, to instruct the mind, without being a burthen to the memory. It contains, in a few words, whence much is to be learned." And Serm. 58, Ol. 42, inter 50, t. 1, p. 343: "Repeat your symbol daily, when you rise; repeat it when you lie down to sleep; render it to the Lord. Do not say, I said it yesterday, I said it to-day, I say it every day. Let it be your last looking-glass; thy riches; the daily attire of your mind. When you rise, do not you dress yourself? so, by reciting your symbol, clothe your soul, and go not out naked. We are clothed with our faith. It is our helmet, and our only one." And Serm. 215, p. 1, t. 5, p. 947: "You have received and repeated your symbol, which you must always retain in your mind and heart, recite in your beds, meditate in the streets, in which your mind may watch, whilst you sleep in body."

3. Hence the catechumens were obliged to recite the symbol by heart before baptism. See St. Austin, Serm. 59, p. 343. Serm. 212, p. 396. Serm. 213, p. 939, t. 5, ed. Ben. He relates, Ep. 227, Ol. 67, t. 2, p. 830, that a certain catechumen was refused baptism because he could not recite the symbol, and, in punishment of his neglect, as he was admonished in a dream, seized with a palsy in all his limbs, and in his tongue. He learned the symbol by writing, and, after this, recovered the use of them, except of his tongue. The Creed, Lord's Prayer, and Decalogue were expounded in sermons to catechumens, and no one admitted to baptism who did not retain them. See St. Austin, Serm. 59, p. 343, &c. The Council of Mentz, an. 813, Can. 47, t. 7, Conc. p. 1251, orders all such to be enjoined severe fasts and other chastisements, who should not know perfectly the Creed, the seal of faith, and the Lord's Prayer. The second Council of Rheims, an. 813, commands, that all know the words, and understand the sense: "for it is not lawful for any Christian to be ignorant of them." The Capitulars of Theodulph, Bishop of Orleans, Capit. 62, an. 797, say of the Creed and Lord's Prayer, that if any one does not know them by heart, and often repeat them in his prayers, he cannot be a Catholic. The Council of Frejus, in the same age, says: "Without them no one can receive

a portion in the kingdom of heaven." St. Charles admonishes all: "That the ignorant are to be asked concerning them before they can be admitted to the sacraments." Conc. Med. 5, Act. Eccles. Med. 5, p. 171.

4. The Nicene Creed was formed by the first General Council of Nice, against the Arian heresy. Some things were added against the Semiarians and Macedonians, who denied the procession of the Holy Ghost. We read these additions in St. Epiphanius in Anchor., and they were approved of soon after in the second General Council held at Constantinople, whence this is called the Constantinopolitan Creed.

The Athanasian Creed was framed against all the other heresies which, soon after Arianism, attacked the holy mysteries of the Incarnation and the Trinity. It can only be called Athanasian, because St. Athanasius was the great champion of the chief points which it most explicitly professes, chiefly against the Arians and Apollinarists. It seems to have been composed by some Gallican prelate in the fifth century, before Eutyches, or even Nestorius, had broached their heresies. It was afterwards adopted by the churches of Spain, as appears from the fourth Council of Toledo, whilst that country had great reason to guard itself against Arianism, brought into it by the Goths. Fortunatus, of Poitiers, wrote a commentary upon it, and it has been used for many ages by all the Western Churches, and by many of the Eastern.

The Creed being the abridgment of what we are to believe by faith, and, as it were, the corner-stone of this structure, every Christian is bound to be perfectly instructed in the rehearsing of each article, that he may recite it with understanding, and also accompany each word with his heart, dilating his affections in sentiments of profound adoration, praise, love, confidence, and other virtues, whilst he professes his firm assent to each mystery.

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## DISCOURSE X.

### ON HOPE.

1. Faith is the ground of hope; for, by knowing the promises of God, and the means of attaining them, we conceive a vehement

desire and strong hope of them. There is a natural hope, which, in good things, is a moral virtue, but, in those that are evil, a passion. This is defined by philosophers an efficacious desire of some absent, difficult, possible good, with a confidence of obtaining it. This is the great support and comfort of human life, and the principle and soul of success in all undertakings. It alone carries man through all difficulties and labours, and gives enjoyment in the prosecution of good. Without its balm, life would be insupportable to men, as the joy of possession and contentment is not the portion of this world. Theological hope produces the same effects in a supernatural life, but so much the more noble as it is more elevated, and its motives stronger and more powerful. It is defined, "a virtue infused by God, by which we expect from him, with a firm confidence, the goods of eternal life." It is a theological virtue, as God is its immediate object; for its motive is his almighty power and infinite goodness. It is infused by God as faith is, and his special gift in our souls, which it raises to a supernatural state or power of acting, and is itself a supernatural habit. "The God of hope will fill you with all peace and joy." —Rom. xv. 13. And the Eternal Wisdom says, Eccl. 24: "I am the mother of holy hope. In me is all hope of life and of virtue."

2. Hope implies not only a noble desire, but also an elevation and effort of the soul to enjoy the possession of God for all ages. Its principal object is God; but all the means of salvation, whether temporal or spiritual, likewise belong to its object, especially all the benefits of grace, which are future. "Hope is of pardon, of grace, and of glory," says St. Bernard, Serm. 45. de Liv. p. 1181. The difficulty of attaining the object is a condition in hope, as obscurity is in faith. Hence hope remains in purgatory, but not in the blessed in heaven, where, the apostle says, "Faith and hope cease, and only charity remains."—1 Cor. xiii. For, "what a man sees, how does he hope?"—Rom. viii. Hence, the saints in glory, till the day of judgment, rather expect than properly hope for felicity, and the glory of their own bodies.

The motive of our hope is jointly the power and goodness of God; that he is able and ready to save us. As this cannot fail, hope is absolutely certain in itself; yet it is accompanied with a fear of our malice and frailty; though he, who hopes, has a firm purpose to attain this felicity by fervour and watchfulness, through the succours of divine grace. Hope remains in sinners, though all sin abates something of its confidence and its free access to

God. Despair and presumption destroy it, by removing its motive. Heresy likewise ruins hope by taking away faith, which is its foundation, and the substance of the things which we hope for.

3. Hope is absolutely necessary to receive pardon of our sins, to live in grace, or to obtain eternal glory. It is necessary to a Christian life. It is only by desire and hope that we are on earth citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, walk towards our blessed country, and belong to the society of the saints. Without it, men are inhabitants of this Babylon, make it their country, live not here as banished men and strangers, and can pretend to no title or right to other benefits. "He who does not sigh a stranger, shall not rejoice a citizen, because the desire is not in him," says St. Austin in Ps. 148, 11. 4, p. 1675. Hope makes a soul love and desire heaven, her dear country, and extend her heart beyond the goods of this world into the riches of eternity, soaring above the heavens to God himself, whom she confidently desires to possess. Hence, it inspires a contempt of this mortal life and its false goods, as empty shadows and dangerous illusions, disengaging us from all fading pleasures and earthly affections, as not having a permanent city, but seeking that which is to come. Heb. xiii. 14. It excites us to love God, who has prepared such blessings for us, and has put into our hands the means of acquiring it. For, as hope arises from faith, so charity springs from hope. Thus charity again produces afresh, and strengthens hope, by a holy circle, as St. Ambrose observes in cap. 17. Luc. For we hope most earnestly to obtain what we love. Hope makes us fear, lest by negligence and sloth we lose what we hope amidst the dangers and rocks of this life, and animates us to labour with watchfulness and earnestness of salvation. "Every one that hath this hope in him sanctifieth himself."—1 John, iii. 3. It gives courage and strength. "Though I should walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me."—Ps. xxii. 4. It comforts and supports us under afflictions, and inspires us to make a good use of them. "By it the saints rejoiced in ignominies, torments, and death, because they sought a better country."—Heb. xi. 14.

4. Hope is the soul of prayer; for we only ask of God the things which we hope for. Hence, in our Lord's Prayer we are taught to ask of God all those goods, both temporal and eternal, which we hope from his bounty, as St. Austin observes, who says: "In the three first petitions eternal goods are begged; in the

other four temporal blessings, which yet are necessary for the eternal."—Enchir. c. 15. The fervour of our prayer will be greater in proportion to the vehemence and ardour of our hope. By hope we pay to God a most acceptable homage of our souls. For by this virtue we profess, and not in words only, but also in our deepest affections and actions, that he is all-powerful, and infinitely good and merciful. This honours him in those attributes in which he chiefly delights; by this we acknowledge him our Father, and show ourselves to be his children, placing all our dependence in him, owning that we are nothing, and have nothing of ourselves, but rest entirely on his paternal goodness and infinite power and mercy. He who delights in mercies above all his other works, must be pleased with a homage by which he is honoured as the Father of mercies. "Because he has hoped in me, I will deliver him."—Ps. xc.

This confidence in God is a principal disposition of heart, which moves him to receive our penance, and to hear our prayers, as he declares in his holy Scriptures: "Let thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us, as we have hoped in thee."—Ps. xxxii. 22. "I have hoped in thee, O Lord, let me not be confounded for ever."—Ps. xx.

5. Men lie under a strict precept of making an act of hope. First, when they are converted from sin, as the Council of Trent declares, Sess. 6, c. 6: "He that hopeth in the Lord shall be healed."—Prov. xxviii. 25. And our Saviour in the gospel often imputes the pardon of sin to confidence in him. The sinner, struck with fear, must raise his confidence in the mercies of God, that he will forgive him if he sues for pardon with a contrite heart. Secondly, a precept of this virtue obliges in the first moral moment of the use of reason, or when the promises of a future life are first suggested to a person. Thirdly, when a person has lost hope by a sin of despair or presumption. Fourthly, when it is necessary to overcome any temptation, especially of despair. Fifthly, in any moral danger of death. Lastly, so frequently, that the acts of this virtue be not intermitted for any considerable time. "We live by hope," says St. Bernard, Serm. 7. in Ps. 90, p. 838. We may continually repeat in our hearts, as well as with our mouths: "Thy kingdom come;" as St. Austin says, Tr. 4. in Ep. Joan. t. 3, p. 2, p. 853: "Because you cannot yet see, let your whole duty be in desires. The whole life of a good Christian is a continued holy desire. By desiring you are made capable to be filled, when it shall come."*

* Desiderando capax efficere, ut cum veniret implearis.

6. The signs of perfect hope in the soul are: 1. If it works in her an entire obedience to the divine laws. 2. If she contemn the world and its false goods; for one that thinks only of the earth, and is wholly buried in it, can never truly be filled with this divine virtue. 3. If she, with continual sighs, desire the kingdom of heaven and the gifts of divine grace, and is solicitous and earnest in the practice of all the means to obtain them. 4. If she resist manfully all temptations and dangers, and bear courageously all afflictions and sufferings in the spirit of virtue. "God makes all omnipotent, who hope in him. All things are possible to him that believes, or has confidence. Is not he omnipotent, to whom all things are possible? Thus the soul, if she do not presume in herself, but rely on Christ, will be able so to command in herself, that no injustice can ever tyrannise over her. As she places her strength in Christ, no violence, no storm, no deceit, no allurement can either throw her down or subdue her, clad with strength from above," says St. Bernard, Serm. 85. in Cant. n. 5, p. 1563. Lastly, true hope expels the fear of the world. How weak must be the faith of a Christian, whilst he forgets that God is his protector? "Thou hast forgotten the Lord thy Maker, who stretched out the heavens, and founded the earth: and thou hast been afraid continually all the day, at the presence of his fury, who had afflicted thee, and had prepared himself to destroy thee; where is now the fury of thy oppressor?"—Isa. i. 13. "If God be for us, who is against us? If wild beasts rage, fear God. Every creature is under him, whom you are commanded to fear."—St. Aug. in Ps. 32. "The Emperor is surrounded by his guards, and he is without fear. A mortal man protected by mortal men is secure. And shall the man, who is protected by the Immortal, fear and tremble?"—St. Aug. in Ps. 26.

7. The first means to obtain Christian hope is to beg it ardently of God, repeating often, with the afflicted father in the gospel: "I believe; Lord, increase my faith."—Matt. ix. 23. He had faith in Christ, but he asked a faith which might raise him to perfect confidence.

The second means is to meditate often, and deeply to penetrate our hearts with the powerful motives which we have to hope in God, his almighty power, his mercy, his fidelity to his promises, and the pledges he has given us of his tenderness, goodness, and holy providence. "There are three things," says St. Bernard, "which so strengthen and confirm my hope, that no want of merits, no consideration of my own baseness, no immensity of the

heavenly glory, can cast me from the height of hope, in which my heart is firmly rooted in God. I consider three things, in which all my hope is placed: the love with which God has adopted me, the truth of his promise, and his power to fulfil it. Let my foolish thoughts mutter ever so much, saying, Who are you? How great is that glory? By what merits do you hope to obtain it? And I will answer confidently; I know in whom I have believed and trusted, and I am assured that he has adopted me in excess of charity, that he is true in his promises, and all-powerful in their execution."—Serm. 3, tom. 6, post Pent. n. 6.

If we consider his power, what can daunt us? What are all the powers of hell, and all the fury of creatures against him? If he is for us, it is as impossible that anything can hurt us, as it is impossible for creatures to resist the arm of the Most High. The three children feared not the threats of the mighty King of Babylon, having God for their protector; him, whose will all nature obeys, by whose immediate help all creatures are moved, and whom nothing can withstand. Without him, all things cease to be. He will overturn all the laws of nature, and even annihilate the universe, sooner than suffer one word of his divine promises to fail.

8. But are we assured, that God will employ his power in our defence? Yes, most certainly. We believe no less in his mercy than in his omnipotence. He is most desirous to assist and save us. Being the sovereign good, he desires to communicate himself to his creatures, with so great an ardour, that no understanding can conceive it. He pities and succours them in their miseries with a love, which he alone can comprehend. His goodness is tender, above that of any father towards us.* He is our most loving Father, by creation, redemption, and adoption. "Can a woman forget her infant, so as not to have pity on the son of her womb? And, if she should forget, yet will not I forget thee. I have graven thee in my hands."—Isa. xiii. 15, 16. Hence he delights to be called our Father: "Your Father knows that you want all these things."—Mat. vi. "Thou art our Father, and Abraham hath not known us, and Israel hath been ignorant of us: Thou, O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer: from everlasting is thy name."—Isa. lxiii. 16. "I am made a Father to Israel."—Jer. xxi. And Christ says: "To your Father, and to my Father."—John, xx.

* "Tam pater nemo, tam pius nemo."—Tertullian.

He is tender of us, because we are the noble workmanship of his divine hands. "Thou hatest nothing of those things which thou hast made; and thou sparest all things, because they are thine, O Lord, who lovest souls."—Sap. xi. "Behold all souls are mine."—Ezek. xviii. On this title the prophets prayed. "Visit that vineyard, which thy right hand hath planted."—Ps. lxxvii. "And now, O Lord, thou art our Father; and we are clay, and thou art our Maker, and we are the work of thy hands."—Isa. lxiv. 8. "Thy hands have made me, and fashioned me wholly round about, and dost thou thus cast me down headlong on a sudden? Remember, I beseech thee, that thou hast made me."—Job, x. 8, 9. "As a father hath compassion on his children, so hath the Lord compassion on them that fear him: for he knoweth our frame."—Ps. ii. 13, 14.

He is not only our Creator, but our Redeemer. So much has he loved us as to have given his only Son for us.—John, iii. 16. He has by this given us a proof of the excess of his infinite love and goodness; he has also, by a new pledge, bound himself to love us still more. For the purchase of a thing is a new title of love and protection, especially if the price was immensely great.

9. He shows in particular his mercy to sinners, and his desire of their repentance. "Whence he is called the Father of mercies."—2 Cor. 1. "He declares that it is not his will that the sinner should die, but be converted and live."—Ezec. xviii. "For this he defers the punishment of sinners, that they may be converted"—Rom. ii. 5; "dissembling the sins of men for the sake of repentance"—Sap. xi. 24; "chastising them that err, by little and little, admonishing them and speaking to them, that they would leave their wickedness"—Sap. xii. 2; whom his divine justice might instantly plunge into hell. He calls upon them by the interior voice of their own consciences, by awakening examples, and by the most loving expostulations, threats, and invitations, of which all the prophets are full, by whose mouths he everywhere testifies how his tender bowels yearn over every soul fallen into sin. How does he expostulate and try all means with sinners, before he punishes them, as he did with Jerusalem before he abandoned it? After many threats against that unfaithful city, he most tenderly expressed his love, and invited it to return, saying, "I am not angry;" disputing in himself, as if in doubt, whether yet to deliver her over to her enemies, and crying out: "Will she not make peace with me? Will she not atone, and make peace?"—Isa. xxvii. 4. "Hear, ye deaf; and ye blind,

behold, that you may see. Who is blind but my servant; or deaf, but he to whom I have sent my messengers?"—Isa. xlii. 18, 19. —Read Jer. vii.—Jonas, iv. &c. If, at last, he is obliged to punish, it is with regret, and he calls it a strange or foreign work to him. "That he may do his work, his strange work; his work is strange to him."—Isa. xxviii. 24. Hence goodness and mercy are called his chief attributes, nay his very essence; and, in their effects, he has surpassed all his other works, as we see in the mysteries of our redemption.

How universally does he promise pardon to all that repent?—Ezec. xi. xxxii. xxxiv. xxxvii.;—Jer. iii. &c. Never did sinner return by a sincere conversion, who did not find pardon. Look to Adam and Eve, Manasses (2 Par. xxxiii.), the Ninevites (Jonas, i. ii. iii. iv.), Magdalene, St. Paul, &c. Meditate on the parable of the prodigal son, and the others, by which our Saviour declares the joy of the whole court of heaven upon one sincere conversion; and the reflections of Bishop Languet, at length, in his book "Sur les Misericordes de Dieu." For this he has promised heaven; for this he has threatened hell. God, inviting to penance, says: "Am not I he?" &c. St. Chrysostom, t. 1, on Penance, p. 1010.

10. The inviolable fidelity of God to his promises is another strong motive to inspire us with confidence in him; a rock, which no waves, no storms can shake. His paternal goodness ought alone to have sufficed to calm all our doubts and fears. But to remove all our distrust and anxieties, he has been pleased to condescend to bind himself down by the most sacred engagement of his promises, which can no more fail than he can cease to be God. Can we entertain doubt or diffidence, after all the promises which he has made, to assure us of his will towards us, and of the good things which he has prepared for us? They are numberless, and all for us. "From them, we are called the sons of promise."—Gal. iv. 28. At a time when he owes us nothing but punishment, he promises us infinite blessings, and his constant protection, if we choose it. Though his word be infallible, he has been pleased to confirm it with his oath. "God meaning more abundantly to show to the heirs of the promise the immutability of his counsel interposed an oath; that, by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have the strongest comfort." —Heb. vi. 17, 18. Oh, happy man, for whom God himself swears, and pawns his own unchangeable truth! but criminal and unhappy, if he still remain suspicious and distrustful.

11. To his oath he has added his written contract or covenant.* And for the pledge of his fidelity, and our greater security, he died, to confirm his testament and alliance with us. He gives himself as our surety, and signs and ratifies our predestination with the same blood with which he effaced the schedule of our condemnation. When we see Christ come from heaven, and crucified for us, giving himself also to be our food in the holy sacrament of the altar, with what confidence do we expect the accomplishment of his promises? "He that spared not even his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how hath he not, with him, given us all things?"—Rom. viii. 32.

The infinite treasure of the merits and of the adorable blood of Christ is made our ransom, is given to us and put into our hands. If the immense joys of heaven are too high for us to aspire to, are they above the infinite merits of Christ? If our sins are grievous, and beyond the atonement of all creatures, is not the blood of Christ sufficient to wipe them away? If our weakness and abyss of indigence affright, let us remember, that the riches of Christ are ours. We offer them to his eternal Father, in atonement for our sins, to cover our own miseries, to supply the imperfections and defects of our corrupt nature, and to draw all strength and grace from them. All hope is rashness and presumption, unless it be grounded on the merits of Christ, on which alone is founded our title to all grace and glory. St. Bernard, in a dangerous sickness, was tempted to despair; but answered the devil in these words: "It is true I cannot presume that I deserve heaven: but Christ, my Lord, has a double title to it, by inheritance from his Father, and by the price of his blood. This second he has transferred on me. Challenging it by his right, I am not confounded. By it, the enemy was vanquished." So, William of St. Thierry, in his Life, b. 1. c. 12.

12. To exercise acts of hope, we must indeed be solicitous to use all proper means and diligence not to tempt God; but in them we must raise our hearts to God, placing all our confidence in him; relying on his mercy and power; saying, always, with the Psalmist, "Thou, O Lord, art my hope."—Ps. xc. Upon which words St. Bernard writes thus, Serm. 9. in Ps. 90: *Qui habitat.* "Whatever is to be done, whatever is to be shunned, whatever is to be suffered, thou, O Lord, art my hope. This is to me the ground of all your promises, and of all my expectation. Let

*"Parum erat promissis; etiam scripto, &c. teneri, voluit."—St. Aug. in B. 109.

another pretend merit, boast that he bears the burden of the day and of the heat, that he fasts twice a-week, and is not like the rest of men; it is good for me to cleave to God alone, and to place all my confidence in him. Others hope in other things: one, perchance, in science; another in worldly cunning; this man in his birth and quality; that in honours; another in some other vanity; I have despised and looked upon everything as dung, because thou, O Lord! art my hope. If rewards are promised me, I will hope to obtain them through thee; if armies rise up against me, if the world rages, if the devil foams, if the flesh burns against the spirit, in thee will I hope. To know this, is to live by faith; nor can any other say from his heart: Thou, O Lord! art my hope. If we have this wisdom, these sentiments, why do we delay to throw away entirely all miserable, vain, useless, and seducing hopes? why not cleave, with all the fervour of our soul and the whole application of our mind, to this blessed hope? If anything can be impossible or difficult to him, seek another to trust in. But he can do all things by his word. Do you doubt of his will? The testimonies of his will are exceedingly credible to us. No man has greater love than to lay down his life for his friends. And when did that Supreme Majesty abandon any that hoped in him? he invites all to trust in him; he forsakes no one who relies on him; he will assist and deliver them, and rescue them, and save them." Ps. xxxvi. 40. "Why? By what merits? Hear what follows: Because they have hoped in him. The cause is sweet, yet powerful and irrefragable. From whatever tribulation they shall cry out to me, I will hear them. Behold, number your tribulations; according to their multitude his consolations have rejoiced my soul. On condition that you convert not yourself to another, on condition that you cry to him and trust in him, and not in any base, earthly thing, you will have placed your refuge most high." Friends, riches, and all earthly things are false, treacherous, and weak. "Cursed is he who trusts in man, or makes flesh his strength." —Jer. xvii. 5. "Trust not in princes," &c.

13. We must trust in the goodness and power of God, with entire confidence and peace. "To hold fast the hope set before us, which we have as an anchor to the soul, firm and sure."—Heb. xi. 19. For hope is in itself, that is, in its motives, and on the side of God, absolutely certain, as his power and goodness cannot fail. "None of them, that expect thee, shall be confounded."—Ps. xxxiv. 3. "Know ye, that no one hath hoped

in the Lord, and hath been confounded."—Eccl. ii. 11. "Hope confoundeth not."—Rom. v. 5. Hence, the apostle expresses his unshaken hope in God, with the utmost assurance: Rom. viii. 38; 2 Tim. i. 12: "I know whom I have believed, and I am certain that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."

Our hope, indeed, is uncertain, and mixed with fear, on the side of our frailty and malice, that we may work our salvation in fear, humility, and watchfulness. But this fear is only accidental to hope, which does not imply it of its own nature. Nor does this fear produce any anxiety, but only fervour and watchfulness, and an entire distrust in ourselves. Sin, indeed, increases this fear, and abates the sweetness of hope. Perfect charity expels servile fear. By hope our souls already possess a certain anticipation of the joys of heaven, and abound in holy joy that our names are written in heaven. "Rejoicing in hope."—Col. iii. 1. St. Paul calls it "our most strong comfort," Heb. vi. 18; and David says: "Let all rejoice who hope in the Lord."

In hope, we likewise acquire fervour, strength, and vigour in the practice of virtue: we perfectly take wind and fly. Isa. xl. "Hoping in the Lord, I shall not be weak."—Ps. xxv. 1. Hope inspires courage, resignation, and joy, under all afflictions, labours, and sufferings. "Hope in the Lord and do good."—Ps. xxxvi.

14. We must exercise acts of hope of the eternal joys of heaven. Secondly, of the pardon of our sins of grace, and of all the means of salvation. Thirdly, it is the same virtue, grounded on the same divine motives, by which we patiently confide in Providence, in all trials and afflictions, and hope for all temporal as well as eternal blessings. What confidence ought we not to have in our most tender heavenly Father, who knows all our necessities, and is able, and most willing and desirous to relieve us? Poverty, want, calumnies, persecutions, &c., ought never to discourage us; for it is not in ourselves that we found our hope. We murmur and fret, because, by a secret pride, we build on our own merits, riches, or strength. It is only in God we are to place our whole confidence, waiting patiently his time for our deliverance. When things seem brought to an extremity, then we must exercise this virtue more strongly. "When things are quite despaired of by men, then is the time of the divine succour," says St. Austin in Ps. 117. Witness Susanna, the three children in the furnace, Daniel in the lion's den, Judith, Tobias, and so many others.

"Can God ever abandon those, on whom he has always continued to heap so many benefits?"—St. Ambr. in l. de Jacob, c. 6. Thus Job confided in God, when he said: "Although he should kill me, I will hope in him."—Job, xi. 15. And David: "If camps stand against me, my heart shall not fear. If war rises against me, in this will I hope."—Ps. xxvi. 3. And he often repeats, Ps. cxviii.: "In thy words I have overhoped." He not only hopes, but hopes above all that can be said or thought by man, in God's mercy, which is infinite, far surpassing all hope; in his words, to endure beyond all time; in his promises, which exceed all merits; and in a happiness, which neither eye hath seen, nor ear hath heard.

## DISCOURSE XI.

### ON DESPAIR, PRESUMPTION, TEMPTING GOD, AND ON THE VIRTUE OF HOLY FEAR.

1. The vices against hope are despair and presumption, to which last we join the tempting of God. Despair is a voluntary diffidence, by which a soul casts off the hope of attaining felicity or grace. It is one of the most enormous of all sins, after those which are directly contrary to the love of God, as blasphemy, sacrilege, &c.; because it is the direct destruction of hope. Secondly, because it deprives God of his darling attribute and chief property, that of his mercy; whence it is more grievous than presumption. Lastly, because it is of all sins the most dangerous, averts the soul the most of all others from God, is the source of all sins, and bears, of all others, the greatest opposition to the spirit of penance. It may be accompanied with heresy, as an erroneous persuasion that God is not able or ready to pardon any sin, to give necessary graces, &c. Or it may be committed without any error in faith, out of sloth, or a violent attachment and slavery of the will to any passion, *e. g.* of impurity; refusing by a positive act to labour, or employ the proper and necessary means to overcome sin, or to gain heaven, whether on account of the difficulty and uncertainty of salvation, or for the love of the world, and unwillingness to renounce sin. It is not despair but sloth, if the soul, without any positive act of the will, casting away all hope, neglect the means of necessary virtue. It is pusil-

lanimity and dejection, not perfect despair, if one, without totally giving up his salvation, fall into despondency about it, and some negligence in the practice of the means of obtaining it; which is a disposition towards this fatal precipice, and in itself most pernicious, as it weakens hope and slackens the sinews of virtue; for which only hope and confidence give courage, cheerfulness, and fervour. "Happy is he, who hath had no sadness of mind, and who is not fallen from his hope."—Eccl. xiv. 2.

2. All pusillanimity is to be vigorously resisted in the beginning. A soul assaulted by that demon is to examine, and thus lay the axe to the root of her evil, whether it proceed from any passion, love of the world, sloth, scrupulosity, &c. The first remedy against the temptation is to lay open the disorder, with entire confidence, to a charitable director, and follow faithfully his advice as of an angel sent by God to conduct us. "Be not wise with thyself."—Prov. iii. 7. The second is, devout frequent recourse to the sacrament of penance; and also, as often as judged expedient, to the holy communion. The third is, a study to obtain the most perfect degree of sincere humility. A fourth, alms and the practice of good works; alms will be a source of great confidence before the high God. Tob. iv. 12. A fifth is, an entire distrust in one's self, no ways secretly building on our own merits, virtue, &c. A sixth is, a firm hope and confidence in the divine goodness and succour. "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above what you are able, but will make also with temptation an issue that you may be able to bear it."—1 Cor. x. 13.

3. To excite this confidence, a soul must meditate often on the goodness and mercies of God. "I myself will comfort you."—Isa. i. 22. "Because he has hoped in me, I will deliver him: I will protect him, because he has known my name. I am with him in tribulation: I will rescue him and glorify him."—Ps. xc. "Come to me, all you that labour and are heavy burdened, and I will refresh you."—Matt. xiii. 18. She must penetrate her heart with the powerful and comfortable motives of hope, especially the clemency of God. "Why will you die, O house of Israel!"—Ezec. xviii. and xxxiii.; Jer. iii. 1; Isa. i. 16. "How great is the mercy of the Lord, and how propitious to those who are converted to him!"—Eccl. xvii. 20. The boundless merits of Christ, the love and mercy, which he testified for sinners on earth. "God so loved the world," &c.—John, iii. 16. "I live in the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered himself for me."—

Gal. ii. 20. "He came not to call the just, but sinners;"—Matt. ix. 13; and made it his delight to converse with them. The efficacy of holy repentance, and the examples of happy penitents, are likewise to be often considered; and prayers and aspirations of divine love and hope often repeated with fervour. "Be not pusillanimous in thy mind."—Eccl. vii. 9. "Say to the pusillanimous: Be thou strengthened, and fear not."—Isa. xxxv. 3. "Act manfully, and let your heart be strengthened, all you that hope in the Lord."—Ps. xxx. 25. "Be strengthened in the Lord, and in the power of his strength."—Eph. vi. 10. A dread of this mischief will be inspired by considering its malice, and how contrary it is to the filial confidence we ought to place in the goodness of God. How would a distrustful disposition in a son alienate and offend a tender, beneficent father! How ungrateful, how injurious is such a behaviour! By considering, likewise, its dangers and evils; for it leaves a soul without vigour, and incapable of virtue, and plunges her into all sorts of disorders; and this without pleasure, or even temporal advantage, depriving the soul of all comfort, robbing her of the sweetness of hope, overwhelming her with sadness and melancholy, and the greatest torment and anxiety man can fall into; and this by a fruitless crime, and for fear of courage to resist it: for which the will, always with the assistance of divine grace, has but to shake it off by one resolute act.

4. Temptations of despair are never to be disputed with or mused upon, but resolutely rejected by a firm act of hope in God, the tender lover of our souls, with an effectual purpose to serve him. Such suggestions, howsoever importunate, are only in the imagination: and there is more noise than danger in them. The devil, like a roaring lion, seeks to disturb us, because he cannot destroy us. Though the outlets of the senses and imagination are seized by him, he is not master even of them: God only suffers him to show in them how hideous a monster he is, and to what despair he is condemned. But God is guardian of your heart against him, and forbids him to hurt your soul, as he did with regard to Job. Job, ii. 6. St. Bonaventure, "Memor sub finem," advises a soul to make him this answer: "If I were to be damned, I would still love God during this whole life, and so much the more ardently as my time is shorter. I will lose no part of it, but praise him with all my strength, by every thought, word, work, and by every member." The pious Hilton says: "Though all the devils in hell, appearing in bodily shapes, said to

thee sleeping and waking, that thou shalt not be saved, or all men living on earth,—and, were it possible, all the angels in heaven too,—believe them not, and be not stirred from thy hope of salvation." Invoke God with the greater earnestness and confidence; remember the tenderness of his infinite mercies. "Thou, O Lord! art sweet and mild, and of much mercy to all who invoke thee."—Ps. lxxxv. 5. "Bountiful to forgive."—Isa. lv. 7. "Rich in mercy."—Heb. iv. 16. "His mercies are above all his works."—Ps. cxliv. 9. Fly also to the patronage of the mother of God, the glorious Virgin Mary.

Some say, that their relapses and continual tepidity alarm them; but is dejection a means to make them rise? Hope is the principle and life of fervour. No one is capable of earnestness, whilst he is persuaded that his labour is lost. No one can love a happiness, which he regards as the good of others, but not intended for himself. No one can have a resolution to go through a penitential, mortified life, who looks upon it as to no purpose. Hope gives the brave courage in battle, and inspires comfort, life, and vigour to persevere to the end.

5. Presumption is a rash expectation of felicity, and of the means to attain it. It may be joined with heresy, as if a man expects heaven by his own strength and good works, without grace, as the Pelagians did; or by grace, without his own endeavours or good works. Or it may be without heresy, as if a man, by an express act of the will, hopes to do penance when he pleases, and to gain heaven howsoever he lives. This last does not destroy the virtue of hope, but abuses its motives, and is a grievous and most dangerous sin against the Holy Ghost, or against the precept of sanctity and penance, and a resisting divine grace, which requires our co-operation. By this sin a guilty man, who justly deserves hell, instead of averting that punishment by his tears and prayers, assumes to himself to dispose of God's mercy and grace, as if he were the master of it; and, as it were, says to God: Come with your graces, when I shall please: and he behaves, as if salvation were the work of his own will, and not of God's mercy. Those are guilty of presumption who expose themselves rashly to dangers of soul or body; or who in necessities neglect the ordinary means, or omit to have recourse to God: likewise all who are emboldened to sin by relying on the divine mercy, by an express act of the will, though not such as sin only with a resolution of doing penance, as St. Thomas observes.

6. Tempting God is a sin, by which a creature makes a trial

whether any perfection be in God or not: whether he actually doubt of it, or only act as if he doubted of it: as if a man neglect ordinary means in expectation of those which are miraculous and extraordinary. It is a vice against the virtue of religion which commands us to honour God: and also against hope, because it is a rash confidence in his assistance. Those are guilty of this sin, who ask or expect revelations or miracles to gratify vanity or curiosity, of which they would make him a favourer, and thus abuse his omnipotence and infinite wisdom to a vain end. Likewise those who neglect the natural means of, *e. g.*, health, or other temporal or spiritual benefits, expecting them miraculously; or who, without cause, present themselves to martyrdom, or rashly expose their lives; or who use the trials called *ordeal*, as trying a criminal by burning irons or the like, expecting that innocence should be protected by a miracle. Another manner of tempting God is to fix and prescribe to him a day, and the manner or bounds of his mercy, as the citizens of Bethulia are reproached by Judith, c. 8, to have done.

7. The remedies against presumption are: 1. To meditate on the maledictions pronounced by the word of God against this crime, and the circumstances which aggravate enormity; for it makes the divine goodness the motive and instrument of sin, and converts it into a weapon to fight with against God: it usurps his sovereign right and dominion, the disposal of his graces, and pretends to give him the law. 2. Perfect humility and the true knowledge of ourselves and of our own weakness, nothingness, and total insufficiency. 3. To place our confidence in God alone, and endeavour not to put, by our pride and sloth, obstacles to his mercy and protection, without which we should certainly perish. 4. The fear of God, which is the check and curb to foolish presumption, and which moves us to speedy and perfect repentance, and to fervour and diligence in all things.

8. Hope produces a holy fear of God, which is reciprocally the maintainer of pious hope, the check and curb of the soul against presumption, and the mother of watchfulness and fervour. "You who fear the Lord, hope ye in him."—Eccl. ii. 9. He that hopes fears to lose his happiness; he who hopes without fear is negligent; and he who fears without hope falls into despair. This holy fear makes us hate and avoid sin. "The fear of the Lord hates evil."—Prov. viii. 13. "The fear of the Lord expels sin."—Eccl. i. 27. It converts the heart to God; and gives courage, strength, and fervour against temptation, and is the

beginning of charity. "They, who fear the Lord, will seek the things that are pleasing to him."—Eccl. ii. 19. "The fear of God is the beginning of the conversion of a soul, the cleansing of vices, and the guardian of virtue," says Cassian, Inst. l. 4, c. 39. "They who fear the Lord keep his commandments."—Eccl. ii. 21. "They who fear the Lord will do good."—Eccl. xv. 1. "The fear of God is the beginning of his love."—Eccl. xxv. 16. It banishes the love and fear of the world, which are the great sources of sin; and it triumphs over all temptations, and contemns all the allurements, threats, and torments of the world. "He who fears God does not fear grief, pain, poverty, banishment, or death," as Lactantius remarks, l. 6. By it a soul is made impregnable to vice, courageous and constant in every virtue. "In fear is the confidence of strength."—Prov. xiv. 26. "He who fears the Lord shall not tremble or fear anything, because he is his hope."—Eccl. xxxiv. 16. "Fear not those who kill the body."—Matt. x. 26. "Tremble not at their fear."—1 Pet. iii. 14.

Holy fear or awe is a homage we owe to God, as our sovereign of infinite majesty and greatness. "If I am the Lord where is my fear?"—Malachy, i. 6. To this virtue he promises all good gifts and graces. "The mercy of the Lord is from eternity to eternity on those who fear him. The seed of men who fear God shall be honoured."—Eccl. x. 23. And Tobias recommends it under this title: "If we shall fear God, we shall have many goods."—Tob. iv. 23. "Fear the Lord, all you his saints, there is no want to those who fear him."—Ps. xxxiii. 10. "Blessed is the man who fears the Lord."—Ps. iii. 1. It is the guardian of all virtues, as it is called by St. Jerome, "Ep. ad Fabiolam," and the most successful means to obtain, or recover and maintain the divine grace. "I have learned in truth," says St. Bernard Serm. 55. in Cant.), "that nothing is so effectual to procure, recover, or preserve grace, as to be at all times in fear before God." "Blessed is the man who is always fearful."—Prov. xviii. 14. "Fear, when grace is present, lest you lose it; fear, when it is gone, to regain it; and fear, when it is restored, lest you should not keep it well." It gives joy in the day of death. "It shall be well in the end with him who feareth the Lord, and he shall be blessed in the day of his death."—Eccl. i. 19. "Be in the fear of the Lord all the day, because thou shalt have hope in the end, and thy expectation shall not be taken away."—Prov. xxiii. 17. It fills the heart with uninterrupted exultation and comfort. "The fear of the Lord is honour, and glory, and gladness, and a

crown of joy. The fear of the Lord shall delight the heart."—Eccl. i. 11.

9. This fear is wholesome and good, as long as it inclines us to secure more and more our salvation; it is a spur to us towards all good, and a bridle holding us from all evil. But then it must not disturb, trouble, or deject us. This would be an excess, and a dangerous fault. We must fear, but our hope must be the stronger. "That you abound in hope, and in the strength of the Holy Ghost."—Rom. xv. 13. Hope is the principle of inward strength and vigour; nor ought virtuous persons to fear hoping too much, as long as they ground all their hopes only on God, and are earnest to neglect nothing to co-operate with his grace. But there is great danger in too weak a hope; souls naturally timorous must, above others, be sensible of this maxim, and be persuaded that distrust is a most dangerous temptation, that it draws a heart from God, cools his love, and insensibly produces a sloth and distaste in his service. It is our pusillanimity and want of confidence that make us succeed so ill in our undertakings for God. "Man of little faith, why hast thou doubted?"—Matt. xiv. 31. The saints triumphed over all dangers by their invincible hope in God. "In thee have our fathers hoped; they have hoped, and thou hast delivered them. They trusted in thee, and were not confounded."—Ps. xxi. 5, 6. Fear, then, must never abate, but strengthen our entire confidence in the mercy of God.

10. There is a fear of the world, as of its displeasure, of human respects, of death, &c. This is most base and criminal; it prefers the creature to the Creator, places its last end in it, and is severely condemned by Christ. "Do not fear those that kill the body."—Matt. x. "Do not love the world."—1 John, ii. There is a second criminal fear, called a *servilely* (*serviel*) or *purely servile* fear, when a soul so much fears torments as to think less of offending God than of suffering them, which is to make them the principal evil, and to prefer them to sin; a grievous disorder and enormity.

A fear of torments is indeed commendable, and a virtue in itself. For reason and nature teach us to love ourselves, and to fear and shun pain when it can be done without neglecting any duty. It is therefore good to fear sin, on account of hell and the divine judgments. This fear of torments restrains not only the heart, but also the interior affection of the will from consenting to sin, as St. Austin observes in Ps. 12, t. 4, p. 139; and St. Thomas shows that it converts the heart from the world to God, and is

from the Holy Ghost: for it is supernatural, as its motive is the revelation of eternal torments. This is called absolutely *servile fear;* because slaves live in the fear of chastisements. It is the beginning of a sinner's conversion, separates his heart from sin, and prepares it for the love of God. "Unless a man begin by fear to serve God, he will not arrive at love," says St. Augustin, in Ps. 149, t. 4, p. 1691. "Fear prepares a place for charity. But when charity comes, this fear, which prepared the heart for her, is expelled. As much as she increases, it is abated. The greater the charity is, the less is the fear. But if there be no fear, there is nothing for charity to enter by. St. Austin, Tr. 9. in Ep. Joan. t. 3, par. 2, p. 888. "Fear is not in charity, but perfect charity casteth out fear, because fear hath pain. And he that feareth is not perfect in charity."—1 John, iv. 18.

11. A fourth fear arises not from the punishment, but from the guilt of sin, and the awe of the divine Majesty. It is called a *filial* or *chaste* fear; because it is the awe of respect and love, and the dread of the offence of our heavenly Father, as that of dutiful sons and faithful spouses. This fear is one of the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost. Isa. xii. It is an effect and fruit of charity, on which it is grounded; and it increases in proportion as charity is more perfect: for, the more a man loves God, the more he fears to offend him, as St. Thomas takes notice, who adds, that it remains in heaven, not indeed arming the blessed against sin or evil, but as to the profound sentiment of reverential awe. "The fear of the Lord is holy, enduring for ever and ever."—Ps. xviii. 10. In this sense the heavenly powers are said to tremble in the presence of God. Job, xxvi. 11, &c. This is a homage which we owe to the sovereign Lord of all creatures, no less than that of love, gratitude, &c. "If I am the Lord, where is my fear?" Mal. i. 6.

12. The means to acquire and nourish in our hearts this holy fear of God are chiefly the meditation on the last things, the constant walking in the presence of God, and devout prayer. "Pierce, O Lord! my flesh with thy fear, for I have trembled at thy judgments."—Ps. xcviii. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."—Prov. i. 7. "It is as a paradise of benediction."—Eccl. xi. 27. "Let us all hear together the conclusion of the discourse. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is all man."—Eccl. xii. 13. We can never be secure in this mortal life. The angels fell in heaven, Adam in paradise, and Judas in the company of Christ. We are always exposed to enemies, and

must always watch and arm ourselves against them in fear and trembling, as St. Paul did. "The fear of the Lord expels sin; for he who is without fear cannot be justified."—Eccl. i. 28. "Unless thou hold thyself diligently in the fear of the Lord, thy house shall quickly be overthrown."—Eccl. xxxii. 4. "A wise man will fear in everything, and in the days of sin will beware of sloth."—Eccl. xviii. 27. "Fear for the past. Be not without fear for sin that is forgiven."—Eccles. v. 5. Fear for the present in a continual spirit of penance, watchfulness, and prayer. In this dangerous sea, even in a calm, fear some hidden sand or rock, or some sudden storm. Fear even to lose this necessary and saving fear; and pray earnestly never to be forgotten in your danger. Fear for the time to come, especially for the great gift of perseverance, which we can never merit, and must continually pray and labour for. "No man knows whether he is worthy of love or hatred; but all things are reserved uncertain for the time to come." "We ought to fear exceedingly, brethren," says St. Austin, in Ps. lxxx. "It is not good that I should give you a false security: I will not give you what I myself have not. Fearing myself, I terrify you. I would make secure, if I were myself so. I fear hell." Yet love, hope, and confidence in God's goodness drive away all uneasiness and trouble of mind, whilst fear produces in us a laborious solicitude. We earnestly pray and watch, but rejoice to see our eternal lot in the hands of so good a God. "In thy hands are my lots."—Ps. xxx. Fearing our malice and inconstancy, we never cease to implore his powerful succour and protection.

## DISCOURSE XII.

### ON DIFFIDENCE AND EXCESS OF FEARFULNESS.

1. My diffidence is very provoking to Almighty God. He is more delighted in his goodness and mercy than in all his other perfections. But by my unfaithful distrust I give them the lie. I offend him in his darling attribute. I stop his goodness from assisting and enriching me. I look upon his riches, his mercy, and goodness, as belonging to others, not to me. I imagine he is nothing but indignation and most rigorous justice with regard to me: but in this I conceive a false notion of you, my God. All

your benefits, all your promises, all your protestations of love regard me, as much as if there were no other creature existing. It is even for me you died. I, in particular, was the creature whom you had then present to your mind, as much as if you thought of no one else. Confide then, my soul, and be assured that thy eternal God is thy Saviour and protector.

2. Want of confidence in God is the cause of misfortunes in the world. If, sensible of our own poverty, weakness, and nothingness, of the emptiness and deceitfulness of creatures, we fly to God with an entire confidence in his power and goodness, nothing can be wanting to us, nothing impossible, though a mountain were to be removed and cast into the sea. Does not God, my soul, justly reproach thee for this want of faith or confidence? To this alone he ascribes in the gospels all want of his assistance. Why art thou so full of fear and distrust? Why art thou so often troubled? Is not God thy loving Father and protector?

3. "Hope is the life of penance, and the pledge of future inheritance."—Eph. i. 13. It encourages the soul, and banishes pusillanimity. It gives perseverance; inspires a holy joy by the thought of future happiness, and a vehement desire and longing expectation of it. It produces a firm and effectual resolution of labouring for it, and is the greatest mark of eternal predestination. It disposes the soul for heavenly graces, and to receive the Holy Ghost. Whereas excess of fearfulness leads to despair, clouds the soul, banishes love, and that divine guest, whose habitation is always in peace. I will for the future rest in the arms of my Saviour, in the providence and love of my God. O how good, how sweet it is to sleep in this holy peace! Prince of Peace, who came to give peace to men of good will, and left it as your last blessing to all that are yours, give it to me, so that nothing may disturb me henceforth.

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## DISCOURSE XIII.

### ON TEMPTATIONS OF DIFFIDENCE.

1. The enemy of my soul labours to affright me with the uncertainty of my future salvation, and with doubts whether my sins are now forgiven me. But, O my God! I will answer him with

confidence, that thy mercies are infinite, and that thou desirest my salvation. On my side, I this moment offer my heart to thee without reserve, imploring thy mercy and grace; and this I will during my life continue to do. Strengthen me with thy grace, and I will live in the firmest hope and assurance of finding mercy. I rejoice that my lot is in thy merciful hands. I rejoice it is hidden from my eyes, lest security should draw me into negligence and presumption.

2. Have I used a sufficient care in my confession and repentance? I calm all these fears, my God, by obeying thy minister; thy goodness has given him to me for my guide and conductor; thou hast commanded me to hear him as thyself.

Should a prophet in thy name assure me, I could not but believe him. Thy minister is no less immediately sent by thee, and is the bearer of thy words and commands to me. If I disobey, I sin by rebellion against thee, and by proudly preferring my judgment to thy express will. Whilst I am clouded, and under trouble of mind, I am not capable of judging what is necessary or best; and by following my own lights I shall certainly throw myself into an endless labyrinth of perplexities, shall live and die in the dangerous state of servile fear and self-love; unless I obey simply, and without a speculative explanation of all my doubts, I may be assured, that even an angel from heaven would not be able to calm my fears and remove my perplexities. I will then renounce my own judgment, and entirely acquiesce in the orders of thy minister. Immortal thanks to thy goodness for having provided me with so easy a means of peace and tranquillity.

3. Whatever temptations of fear the devil suggests, I will always answer them with the royal prophet: "God is my mercy; yes, he is all my mercy." He is infinite in mercy, he is all mercy, and that mercy is all for me, whom he created to his own image, redeemed with his own precious blood, and loves for all eternity.

If I have sinned, his sacred passion and infinite merits cry out aloud, that I am at this moment again reconciled to him, if I love him. Nothing shall ever disturb this my firm hope. No; though all the devils in hell appearing in bodily shapes said to me, sleeping and waking, that I should not be saved; or all men on earth, or all the angels in heaven, were it possible, I would not believe them, or be stirred from my hope of salvation. I would imitate that holy monk, who, when another told him it had been revealed to him he should be damned, answered: "Praise be to God alone in everything. I will then double and

treble my practices of penance and prayer, certain still of moving God to mercy. I will embrace my God with the two arms of humility and love."

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## DISCOURSE XIV.

### ON ACTS OF CONFIDENCE.

1. Whatever I hope, fear, avoid, or do, thou, O Lord! art my only hope. This is the cause of all my promises, the ground of all my expectations. Let another display his merits; let him say he bears the burden of the day and heat; let him allege he fasts twice a-week, and glory he is not like other men; it is good for me to adhere to God alone, to place all my confidence in the Lord my God. One may confide in learning, another in worldly cunning, a third in his birth or nobility, others again in riches, power, or other foolish vanities. All these things I look upon as dung, because you, O Lord! are my only hope. If rewards or glory be granted to me, it is through you I hope to obtain them; if battles appear against me, if the devil be enraged, the world threaten, the flesh allure; in you alone will I confide.

2. Why do not I make haste to throw aside all vain, unprofitable, and deceitful hopes, to adhere to this alone, which is firm, happy, and perfect? Cast all thy cares upon him, my soul, and he will provide, because he has care of thee. If thou thinkest anything impossible to him, seek another in whom thou mayest hope; but he can do all things by his only word. What is easier than for him to speak the word? If he decree to deliver me, I am delivered; if he please to raise me up, his will is my life; if he will, he can give me an eternal crown; he can do whatever he pleases.

3. I cannot doubt of his power, which knows no bounds; but can I fear his will? No, still less, if possible. The evident tokens of his love, and desire of my salvation, make this most manifest. No man has greater love than he who lays down his life for his friend. Yes, God's love for me is greater; he died for me when his enemy. He has, moreover, bound his love by a solemn promise and oath to succour me in all afflictions and calamities that can befall me. And on what merits, on what condition on my side? only if I invoke him and put my whole trust

in him. O how sweet, and, through his grace, which can never be wanting, how easy is this condition! Let the dangers be greater than those of the three children of the furnace; let the calamities surpass those of holy Job or Tobias; if I hope in God, and cry to him, he will certainly assist me. No one ever hoped in him, and was abandoned or confounded. Heaven and earth will sooner pass, &c. Read "Blosius's Comfort of the Dejected."

## DISCOURSE XV.

### ON CHARITY OR DIVINE LOVE.

1. The love of God is two-fold: the *first* is the love of hope or *desire;* or, as the schoolmen call it, of *chaste concupiscence.* By this we love God, as known by faith, as our last end, and for our own happiness in possessing him. The *second* is the love of *benevolence,* or *charity,* by which we love him for his own sake, or because he is infinitely good in himself. The former is more imperfect and inferior, and has more of the love of ourselves than of God, whom it loves because he will make us happy. Yet it contains nothing inordinate, but is good, and is a virtue. For it does not refer God to itself, any more than God referred his Son to the world, when he gave him for the world; but it precisely desires God to itself as its own supernatural last end. To love ourselves in the order of God's holy will is certainly just, and a duty and virtue. This love of *desire* is the first ground of the virtue of hope, though it may also exercise its acts upon the motive of true charity, desiring to possess God, only to love and praise him more purely and more perfectly in the union of his glory.

2. The love of benevolence or charity is the love of God above all things for his own sake, or because he is good in himself. The Scriptures and fathers know no love of God which is not above all things, or from the whole heart. Matt. xxii. 37; x. 37; Deut. iv. 29; Joel, ii. 12. Inferior acts of benevolence are too imperfect to claim the name or privileges of this virtue, though they, in a lower degree, belong to it as imperfect acts or commencements. Charity is a love of *preference* above all things, esteeming and prizing God before all things, allowing no competition or rivalship with him, disposed to lose everything rather than God, and to renounce them if his will require it. "Who will

separate us from charity?"—Rom. viii. 35. "He who loves father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me."—Matt. x. It is likewise above all things as to its object, desiring all glory to God above all things, rejoicing in his infinite perfections, and saying from the heart: "To God alone be honour and glory."—Rom. xvi. "If anything could be added to God from our works," says St. Thomas in 3 Dist. 39, q. 1. a. 1. ad 3 and 4, "he who has charity would do more for God's felicity than for his own."

But it is not necessary that charity should be the most felt among the affections of the heart (though it be generally, but not always or essentially, accompanied with an affectionate overflowing sweetness and feeling in the heart); for a person may weep more easily at the death of a friend than for sin, though he would regret that temporal loss much less than his having offended God. Whatever may be the intenseness of feeling in charity, it is certain that the will must really have a far greater esteem and preference for God and his will than for all things; which can scarcely be understood without a greater ardour in the service of God than with regard to any other object. "The least charity loves God more than the greatest passion can love gold and silver," says St. Thomas, 3, p. q. 70, a. 4.

3. Many say they love God, but deceive themselves. The heart cannot be seen; and an act of charity must be, 1. *interior*, because from the heart; 2. *sovereign*, or above all things, because from the whole heart; above the love of father or mother. "The measure of loving God is to love without measure," says St. Bernard, De Dilig. Deo. 3. It must be also *gratuitous*. "The motive of loving God is God himself. God is not loved without a reward, though he is to be loved without the view of a reward. True love deserves a recompence, but does not ask it."—Ibid. 4. It is *universal*, keeping faithfully all God's commandments. The chief marks to show that charity reigns in a Christian heart are, a sovereign horror of sin, and diligent flight of all dangers and occasions of it; a constant watchfulness; an earnest care of salvation, and the use of all the means to attain it; unwearied labour in the pursuit of virtue, and zeal to promote the honour of God and his holy love; a holy uniform conduct of life and actions; fraternal charity; the hatred of the world and its vanities; the constant remembrance and desire of heaven; joy and constancy in labouring and suffering for God. The contrary signs show the love of God to be wanting in a soul; as a life of pleasures, sloth, vanity, and curiosity; love of the world; a

mixture of any other foreign affection *in the whole mind.* We must love ourselves and all other things only for God and to God. In this matter Christians deceive themselves, and divide their hearts between God and the world. He deserves and challenges our whole heart, and all its affections. "Wo to the man with a double heart."—Eccl. ii. 13. "Their heart is divided; now they shall perish."—Ose. x. 2. He loves God less, who loves anything with him not for his sake. "Christ will have no partnership; he will possess alone what he has bought at so great a price. When men make a part in their heart to God, and a part to the devil, God, offended at the affront, departs, and the devil possesses the whole," says St. Austin, Tr. 7. in Joan. This is a spiritual adultery, and an infidelity to our heavenly spouse, who says, "I will espouse thee to myself for ever; and I will espouse thee to myself in fidelity, and thou shalt know that I am the Lord."—Ose. ii. 19. Our love ought to be most firm; constant under all trials; exercising all our strength and power in every action; nay, were it possible, it ought to be immense as God is, infinite as God is. It must at least occupy and fill our whole heart, and vigorously employ all our faculties. "He who says that he knows God, and keeps not his commandments, is a liar."—1 John, ii. 4. "If any one love me, he will keep my word."—John, xiv. 23. "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me."—John, xiv. 21. "Let us not love in word, nor in tongue, but in truth."—1 John, iii. 18. "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, but offend in one point, is become guilty of all."—James, ii. 10. "Because he breaks the charity, on which the whole law depends," says St. Austin, Ep. 29. ad Hieron. t. 2, p. 45, ed. Lov. 5. Charity must be active and fervent. "Love cannot be idle," says St. Austin, in Ps. xxxi.* And St. Thomas: "Love does great things, and thinks them little: does many things and thinks them few: works long, and thinks it very short."—Opusc. 60, 6. Charity ought to be pure, without mixture, or a disrelish of the practices of penance and virtue, hard-heartedness to the poor &c. As love is interior, we cannot judge of it, even in ourselves, but by these exterior marks: for it does not consist in protestations or words, too often apt to lie and deceive.

4. A modern sect of false contemplatives, called *Quietists*, pretended to establish a pure habitual state of disinterested divine

* Dilectio vacare non potest.

love, in which a soul should be, in her superior or rational part, stripped of all desires, hope, or feeling; rendered perfectly indifferent as to her own salvation and damnation; suspended in inactive contemplation on God; fixed on him by pure faith and abstraction of mind from all desires; lastly, not concurring to or answerable for whatever passes, even criminally, in the lower or sensible part of the soul. These propositions contain many fanatical errors. For, 1. We call that love interested and mercenary, which seeks itself, or some recompence out of God, not that which seeks God himself. 2. In the most perfect habit of charity there always remains the habit of the love of desire and of hope, and acts of each are to be often formed. 3. All men are obliged to have hope; also to pray for bliss; consequently to have an effectual desire of it. 4. God is amiable for his benefits to us, and as our Redeemer; consequently is to be loved also under this respect. 5. We are bound to wish our neighbour's happiness; and why not our own? 6. We were created for bliss; therefore we ought to desire it. We may argue in like manner as to the fear of hell.

The love of desire easily leads to, and terminates in the love of true charity. For he who truly loves God as good in him, easily ascends to the love of God as good in himself. Nay, the love of charity itself naturally inclines the heart to desire him strongly. For love always desires the union of the object which it loves, and produces a vehement impulse or effort towards it.

5. Charity is a special gift of God, the greatest of his commandments, the friendship of a creature with his God, the mother, queen, and soul, or form of all virtues, without which there is no true virtue meritorious of eternal life. Habitual charity is not the person of the Holy Ghost, though it brings into the soul his special presence, but a supernatural quality or habit infused by God, by which God is loved for himself above all things, and all, that are capable of bliss, are loved for God. It is a theological virtue, because its object in every respect is only God, and in the most noble manner. It is a special, and the most excellent gift of God, infused only by his grace in our souls. "The charity of God is poured forth in our souls by the Holy Ghost, who is given to us."—Rom. v. 5. It is by the same theological virtue, because from the same motive, that we love ourselves, and all men and angels for the sake of Almighty God; as, when we love a man, we love his children, servants, and all that belong to him, for his sake. God declares this precept of loving him with our whole heart, "the greatest and the first commandment;"—Matt. xxii.

38; and that the love of our neighbour is the second and the next to it. He adds: "On these two commandments dependeth the whole law and the prophets."—Ib. For all the ten commandments may be reduced to the love of God and of our neighbour, which two commandments are strictly but one and the same, viz., that of holy charity, as St. Austin observes.

Whence St. Paul calls the love of our neighbour the fulfilling of the law. "For, if there be any other commandment, it is comprised in this word, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."—Rom. xii. 6.

6. Charity is the friendship of a man with God.* "Thy friends are exceedingly honoured, O God!"—Ps. cxxxviii. "Made partakers of the friendship of God."—Sap. vii. "Abraham was made the friend of God."—James, ii. 23. "You are my friends."—John, xv. 14. Friendship is defined by philosophers, "a mutual benevolence, with some communication of goods and counsels, on a resemblance of nature or manners." Love of *desire* suffices not; it must be a *benevolence,* and this mutual, and known on both sides; for no one is a friend of another without knowing it. Benevolence may be in one, but this must be reciprocal to make it friendship. Indeed, as man can never love God to an equality with his love, or what he deserves, this is a friendship, not of equality, but of reciprocity, in which each party loves according to his condition and power. Here is a mutual communication of benefits, as the philosopher requires, when he says: "All things are common amongst friends." God bestows on us his graces and favours, declares us his sons, and makes us partakers of his treasures and kingdom. We make him the return of our thanks, our hearts, and the sacrifice of ourselves and actions. He imparts to us the knowledge of his mysteries. "Can we conceal from Abraham what I am going to do?"—Gen. xviii. 17. "I will not call you servants; for a servant knows not what his master does."—John, xv. 15. As we cannot sufficiently admire, love, and thank God for his wonderful goodness and condescension in admitting us to his divine friendship, or adequately esteem its dignity, honour, and advantages, so we must contemn, forego, and cheerfully suffer all things, to make ourselves worthy of it. Why do we not say with Politianus, the courtier, mentioned by St. Austin, Conf. lib. 8, c. 6. "What do we aim at or pretend to by

* Read St. Thomas, 2. 2. a. q. 23. a. 1. et F. Honorè Ecla. Contempt. T. 3. c. 1. 2. p. 27.

all our toils and dangers? To obtain the inconstant favour of the Emperor. Behold, I am this moment the friend of God if I only will."

7. Charity is the mother and queen of all virtues, and the most noble amongst the theological. "Of these charity is the greater."—1 Cor. xiii. 13. "Charity is the most excellent of all virtues," says St. Thomas, "as it attains God to rest in him."—2 qu. q. 25, a. 6. It remaineth in heaven when faith and hope will be no more. "Charity never falleth away."—Ib. v. 8. It only changes the state of its object in glory. It is the form, the life, and soul of all other virtues; for, though they may be true virtues without charity, yet without it they are dead, and without their form, or the power of meriting before God. "How great is charity, which if it be wanting, all the rest are possessed in vain; if it exist, all things are with it;" exclaims St. Prosper, Sent. 32. St. Paul assures us, 1 Cor. xiii., that though he should speak with the tongues of men and angels, if he had not charity, he should be only as a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal, *i. e.*, empty noise; and if he had the gift of prophecy, and should know all mysteries and secrets of grace and nature, and had faith so as to be able to remove mountains, and had not charity, he was nothing; and though he should give all his goods to the poor, and deliver his body to the flames, if he had not charity, it would profit him nothing. "Have charity, and thou wilt have all things: for without it, nothing will profit, whatever thou canst have," says St. Austin, Tr. 32. in Joan., p. 529, t. 3. St. Thomas proves that it is the form of all virtues, because it directs their acts to their supernatural last end, gives them their beauty and tendency, which is their perfection before God, and makes them meritorious of eternal life, as the artificial disposition of the colours by a skilful hand gives the form and beauty to a piece of painting. He shows also that it is the mother of all virtues, because it commands the exercise of all other virtues, and transforms them all, and even the most ordinary actions of life performed by it, into a new and far more noble order of perfect virtue. For every action, even the least and meanest, becomes a most perfect virtue before God, if performed through the motive of perfect love; for he considers not what is offered, but chiefly from how pure and ardent a charity.

8. The love of God is something so excellent and so great, that no glorified spirit in heaven, nor any creature that is or can be framed, can do anything more sublime, more noble, or high. All

the powers of men and angels can do nothing better or greater than to employ themselves in this holy love, which incomparably excelleth all other works and supernatural virtues. All the blessed spirits in heaven have, to all eternity, no other occupation than to contemplate and love the infinite ocean of all good, and to rejoice in him; for whether they adore, praise, thank, or glorify his boundless Majesty, or execute faithfully his will in the ministry, in which he places them, they do all in the seraphic ardour of pure love, and can no more cease one moment from repeating the acts of his love than they can cease to be happy. What is far more, this is the incessant and eternal employment of God himself, who from eternity to eternity is continually taken up in loving and enjoying himself, and his own infinite perfections. He even takes the title of love itself, being the pure fire of infinite love. "God is charity;"—1 John, iv.; because he is himself essentially boundless love, and all that he does proceeds from pure love. Likewise, because he communicates to us by his grace this divine charity, which is a participation of his own; and he requires nothing from us except that we love him. All other things which he commands us are only helps to this love, or the accomplishment and exercise of it. And nothing is more indispensable, more just, more profitable, or more glorious, than that we should render, without ceasing, this homage of our love to him, who is infinite goodness, and whom we can never love as much as he deserves.

9. Charity justifies us, blots out all our sins, sanctifies our souls, and renders them the objects of God's love. "I love those who love me."—Prov. viii. 17. "Many sins are forgiven her, because she has loved much."—Luke, vii. 48.

It makes the service of God sweet and easy. By it, labours and sufferings for God are pleasure to the heart. It fills the soul with perpetual joy—joy which the world can never take from her, and places her under the special providence of God, so that nothing can hurt her. "The Lord keeps all who love him."—Psalms, cxxiv. 20. It crowns all her actions and moments, loads her with merits, and obtains by every act a new increase of grace. "He shall receive the crown of life which God has promised to those that love him."—1 Peter, i. 12. "Partners of the divine nature."—2 Peter, i. 4. "Sons of God, heirs of God, and co-heirs of Christ."—Rom. viii. 16. "Every one who loves is born of God."—1 John, iv. 7. "He who abides in charity, abides in God, and God in him."—1 John, iv. 16. "If any one love me, he

shall be loved by my Father, and I will love him."—John, xiv. 23. Like a devouring fire, it consumes all earthly affections in the soul, commanding all her powers. It unites us to God, whereas the property of love is the closest union; it transforms us into him, and communicates to us the participation of his infinite riches and graces. "He who cleaves to God is one spirit with him."—1 Cor. vi. It expels servile fear. "Fear is not in charity; but perfect charity casteth out fear, because fear hath pain: and he that feareth is not perfect in charity."—1 John, iv. 18. It also makes a soul superior to all evils. "Love is strong as death."—Cant. viii. 6. "A great word," exclaims St. Austin in Ps. xii.; "the strength of charity could not be expressed in a more sublime manner. For who resists death? Men resist fire, water, the sword; they resist powers, they resist kings. Death only comes, which no one resists; nothing is stronger than it. Therefore charity is compared to its strength." Of it St. Paul could say: "I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor might, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."—Rom. viii. 38, 39. Sufferings, crosses, and torments are its fuel. Instead of abating it, they make it blaze higher, and burn more vehemently, as stubble meeting a raging fire. "To those that love God, all things co-operate to good."—Rom. viii. 28. "Many waters cannot quench charity, neither can the floods devour it. If a man should give all the substance of his house for love, he shall despise it as nothing."—Cant. viii. 7.

Richard of St. Victor, in his book "On the Degrees of Charity," shows how sweet, how invincible, how insatiable it is, and that it knows not the very name of pain or difficulty in the service of God. *Lastly*, it brings along with it, or perfects all other virtues; repentance for, and perfect hatred of, sin, patience, and joy in suffering, perfect obedience to all God's commandments, and the accomplishment of all our duties; sincere humility, for the knowledge of God gives us the most feeling knowledge of ourselves and our own baseness and nothingness; firm confidence in him, for a soul, by love resting in God, and dwelling in him, fears nothing from creatures, and sets the heavens, earth, and hell at defiance; fortitude, for no affliction, obstacle, or danger can terrify or move a heart united to God by love, and joined to the sovereign Master of the universe; chastity, for the love of God excludes all mixture of profane love of creatures. It is particularly jealous

of the least affection or spot of impurity; creating a perfect cleanness of heart, constancy, liberty, purity of affection, fervour in works, zeal to promote by all ways the divine honour; love of solitude, and hatred of the world, to enjoy the society of God; attention to every duty and occasion of virtue, and a perpetual watchfulness over ourselves and all our thoughts and actions, for it is quick-sighted to discover the least foreign, secret, profane flame, which arises in the heart, and is solicitous and careful immediately to extinguish and extirpate the least spark. But the greatest of all its privileges and prerogatives is, that it overcomes God himself, and forces him, who is all powerful and invincible, to bow down and humble himself to it; it disarms his hand when it is ready to fall upon and crush the sinner; it has the power to make him in a moment revoke his sentence of condemnation, and changes his anger and justice into mercy and love; it triumphs over his heart, and obliges him to exalt a creature into a partnership of his friendship and of his own glory. "If charity be so great and so amiable when described, what is it when possessed?" cries out St. Austin, Tr. 7. in Ep. Joan., t. 3, p. 876.

10. God has commanded us to love him with our whole hearts, and with all our strength. Deut. vi.; Matt. xxii.; 1 Cor. xiii. This is the first and greatest of all the commandments. *First*, in its extent; for it includes all the rest, and is the accomplishment of the whole law. *Secondly*, in the intention of the supreme Legislator, who refers all the others to it, and makes it alone the end of them all. "Charity is the end of the precept."—1 Tim. i. 5. *Thirdly*, in dignity and merit; for it gives the value to every other virtue. *Fourthly*, in order; for it is the foundation of all Christian perfection. *Fifthly*, in its duration; for it subsists for ever. *Sixthly*, in excellence; for it is the supreme perfection and elevation, at which any rational creature can arrive.

If this sovereign love of God above all things be not the ruling affection of our hearts, we transgress this first and greatest of the divine commandments: "He that loves not, abides in death."—1 John, iii. 14. We are bound, moreover, always to advance in divine charity, in which consists the perfection of virtue. "They shall go from virtue to virtue."—Ps. xxxiii. "Pray that your charity abound more and more."—Phil. i. 9. "May God give you increase, and make your charity abound more and more to one another."—1 Thes. ii. 12. "The inward man is renewed from day to day."—2 Cor. iv. 16. "He that is just, let him be

justified still; and he that is holy, let him be sanctified still."—Apoc. xxii. 11.

11. The perfection of a thing consists in the attaining of the end for which it was created. The ultimate end of a rational creature is God. Our perfection, therefore, must necessarily consist in divine charity, which unites our soul to God, places us in our proper centre, and brings us to our last end. We shall obtain it perfectly only in heaven, where our union with God will be made perfect; and this is the end of the precept of charity, which will be completely fulfilled only in the state of glory. It is of the perfection of the end of the precept, that we are to understand St. Austin, L. de Perfectione Justitiæ, c. 8, t. 10, p. 175, and St. Bernard, Serm. 150. in Cant. p. 1488, and which they say no man can arrive at in this mortal life. But the precept itself, or the obligation of the precept, may certainly be fulfilled by just men on earth, who love God with a true love of esteem and preference above all things. No one, however, can have this love, who does not burn with a desire, and who does not continually labour to advance in this holy and pure charity. "Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord."—2 Peter, iii. 18. What a noble career, what a spacious field is open to a Christian, in the immensity of divine love in which he is always to advance! Yet how great progress soever he shall have made in it, he will ever see an infinity beyond him, and that his love still falls infinitely short of what God deserves, whose boundless amiable perfections infinitely surpass all the homages of creatures. This reflection ought vehemently to excite us to apply ourselves to love God to the utmost power of our narrow capacity, and continually to labour in enlarging it.

12. All persons are particularly obliged to form an act of divine charity, when they first arrive at the use of reason, or at the light of faith; also in every probable danger of death, both to put on the armour against their spiritual enemies, and to go forth to meet their spouse with the lamp of charity burning in their hands, and clothed with the nuptial garment. Likewise, if such an act of love be necessary to repel any dangerous temptation to sin: and when it is necessary to raise a soul from mortal sin. *Lastly*, acts of divine charity are to be frequent; for a considerable delay or intermission would be a mortal sin, as has been said of faith and hope. They are comprised in sincere acts of praise, adoration, thanksgiving, oblation of ourselves to God, &c. They

may daily be formed to accompany all our actions, and the exercise of other virtues.

St. Thomas, St. Bonaventure, and others teach, that for any virtuous action to be meritorious of grace or of eternal life, it must not only be done in a state of grace, and for some supernatural motive; but must also proceed from and be directed by a motive of actual charity. For the Apostle (1 Cor. xiii.) speaks of actual charity, when he declares it necessary even to faith, martyrdom, &c., that they may merit eternal life; for the characters he gives it, viz., that it is patient, &c., denote actual, not habitual charity. The crown of life is promised only to those that love God; James, i. 12; and only for such works as are done in the name of Christ, or for him; Matt. x.; John, xv. &c.; but it suffices if charity be virtually the principle of any action, and the real motive to the practice of it. For this purpose it should be frequently renewed in the day, as Bellarmin and others observe. It is advisable to make a new act of divine love in every considerable new employment, by raising our hearts afresh to God in some thought or aspiration of praise, adoration, oblation, or the like. The greater the fervour with which this is done, the higher will be the degree of merit in every work.

## DISCOURSE XVI.

### MEANS TO OBTAIN AND IMPROVE DIVINE CHARITY IN OUR SOULS, AND ON THE ACTS OF THIS VIRTUE.

1. Here, more than on any other occasion, prayer is the first means to be employed, and has the greatest success. It is true, that all good is the proper object of man's will, which is made to love it. But charity being a supernatural love, and the perfection of our supernatural life, the will, with all its efforts, can never obtain it by its own strength. Prayer is, therefore, a resource absolutely necessary on this occasion, and we must ask to receive. But we must ask it with a perseverance, fervour, and earnestness proportioned to so great a gift. This will continually enlarge and fit our souls more and more to receive it, by increasing our languishing desires and thirst of it. This will move Almighty God to bestow on us this treasure, which he commands us most strictly

to ask of him, only out of an infinite desire to enrich us with it. Hence, to make this petition is to make him the prayer, which is of all others the most agreeable to him; it is to beg that he may execute his own designs upon us, and that he may be pleased to satisfy his own love and ardent desires. But, alas! few ask this divine charity of God, because they esteem it little; and their desires of it are so very tepid and languid, that they scarcely think of asking of him this greatest of all his gifts. If we desire to obtain this his most precious and holy love, we must conjure him without intermission, and with the greatest earnestness of which we are capable, that it will please him to kindle this his divine flame in our breasts.

2. The second means to procure holy charity is the mortification of self-love, its capital enemy, in our souls. For it will enter in proportion as we purify our hearts. The diminution of concupiscence is the increase of charity, as St. Austin says; and charity is perfect, when there is no concupiscence. By self-love is meant not that virtuous love, by which we love ourselves in God, and desire our happiness in him; but that inordinate love, by which we seek the satisfaction of our senses and inclinations in perishable goods, which is the source of all our passions and sins, which easily insinuates itself into all our actions, and which often dignifies itself under the name of every virtue. This we must study perpetually and universally to resist and destroy in all its branches, but especially in our predominant passions. Without this we shall be governed only by the inclinations of nature. Can the love of God ever find place in such a heart? We must first learn the holy hatred of ourselves, before we can obtain divine charity. If we truly hate ourselves, that is, the corruption of our heart, we shall rejoice to mortify all that flatters sensuality, pride, or any inclination of corrupt nature. Without this crucifixion of the source of our passions, without this hatred of ourselves, our virtue will be only exterior, our devotion rather in the senses and lips than in the heart, and all our exercises of piety not so much the fruit of grace as of temper, constitution, or a happy education. The continual victory over our inclinations, a continual practice of the mortification always to overcome ourselves, even in little things, as in refusing our eyes and other senses too great liberty even in ordinary things, is a great good, and the shortest way to a perfect love of God. The saints arrived at it only by means of a constant course of self-denial. The most profound humility is, above all others, the most essential means to

remove the principal obstacles to divine love in our hearts, which are those caused by pride. "Two loves have made two cities; the love of ourselves, to the contempt of God, founded the earthly city; but the love of God, to the contempt of ourselves, the heavenly city," says St. Austin, l. 14. de Civ. Dei, 8. The first must be destroyed, to lay the foundation of the second. "Whoever desires to nourish charity, let him labour in extirpating concupiscence," says the same father, l. 8, 3, quæ. et qu. 36.

3. The love of God is to be pure, without the mixture of any love contrary to it. He who loves any creature, not for God, loves God so much the less, and with his whole heart. Pure love sacrifices all the affections of the soul entirely to God. Charity seeks not its own interests. 1 Cor. xiii. 5. It does not exclude the desire of our own happiness, as the Quietists pretended; which would be inordinate: for no man can be indifferent to his own damnation or salvation, even on any pretence of having no other will than that of God's greater glory; for the will of God is, that we save our souls; and though the love of God must be the predominant affection of our soul, even above our fear of hell, yet no one is to make chimerical suppositions.

We are even bound to love ourselves, our neighbours, and all God's creatures; but in God, and according to the order of his providence, as he has ordered us to love them; and only for his sake, as it is his will that we should love them, not to seek merely ourselves or our own satisfaction; for this is the corruption of nature, and a defiling of the love of God with an impure mixture. Oh! did we see into the bottom of our hearts, what secret researches of self-love, what hidden monsters which we caress, should we not discover there? What self-love, what subtle attachments to our own will or private judgment, what inclinations of corrupt nature entertained, what tenderness for this perishable body, what sentiments unworthy of and contrary to the pure love of God! The most perfect always bewail an odious mixture of this earthly love with their love of God; and it was their constant application to labour to purify their hearts more and more from it, and to discover the least earthly filth in their affections. We are so much blinded by self-love, that we never remove its film from before our eyes, to discern the disguises of our affections, that sloth which often enervates us, that pride which frequently puffs us up, that envy which secretly gnaws us, and that sensuality which continually seduces us. To root out this evil, a strict watchfulness over the motions of our hearts, a constant

practice of the mortification of our senses, will, and inclinations, and assiduous prayer and holy meditation, are our indispensable duty. Thus shall we dispose ourselves to the love of God. Divine charity, as it is made more and more perfect, will consume and destroy self-love, and subdue all our affections to itself.

4. The devout and frequent consideration of the motives of divine love is the next means. The knowledge of the object goes before the love, and excites it. The will is blind, unless the understanding presents its light, and shows it the beauty and perfections which command its love. The goodness, the greatness, the perfections, the benefits of Almighty God must be meditated on thoroughly, to give the soul a true knowledge of God, and to inflame the heart. Likewise, no one can love God, who does not desire to think on him. What should we think of the love of a friend, who should never love our company, or even bear to think of us? We are commanded to love God with our whole soul. The understanding is part of the soul as well as the will. It must then be employed in love, in its manner, *i. e.*, by meditating on the graces and goodness of God; and *secondly*, by the submission and sacrifice of its lights and knowledge to true love. And as it inflames the will by its light, so is it again enlightened and purified in its knowledge from the fire of love in the will, which sends back its lights more pure after they have passed through its flame. Thus, these two powers, by entertaining a perpetual commerce of light and love, mutually assist each other in this holy exercise.

5. Though the understanding concurs to love, it is properly the act of the will. It is principally by the exercise of the affections in loving that this gift is to be improved, the other means being rather preparatory to it. Sentiments of the heart are the food of love, and nourish and entertain it. By them the soul always mounts higher; for every act of love contributes to increase the habit, and to make the following act more intense, more pure, and more perfect. Without the continual repetition of these acts love soon languishes, and is at last extinguished by the love of creatures entering in its place. A human heart cannot be without some love, for love is its life. Hence, creatures quickly fill a soul that neglects continually to feed itself on God. Besides, love is always making presents to its beloved. That heart does not love, but is governed by self-interest, which always asks and never gives. God bestows his graces and favours; he never ceases to shower them down upon us; but then he expects a return to his

love, without which his commerce with us is interrupted and broken. In our extreme indigence can we give anything to God? He is the inexhaustible fountain of all treasures, and we are poor and empty; yet he finds something in our poverty itself to exact from us. This is our heart, our love. And this he requires to enrich and inflame it. For all his eternal love, and his infinite goodness and benefits, he only exacts our love in return. He says only, "Son, give me thy heart."

And this he does, too, for our interest. And shall we sacrilegiously refuse him this, to give it to the devil? We ought never to cease paying him this sacrifice both by exterior and by interior acts of love. By exterior, suffering with patience and joy; labouring assiduously in the practice of every virtue; an exact fidelity in keeping his commandments and counsels; and by offering and directing all our thoughts and actions to God out of an intention of pure love. It sits on the middle of the heart as on its throne, surrounded by all the virtues; it puts them all in motion, and gives them their value and merit; it directs all the senses, all the affections of the heart, and all the powers of the soul. It is insatiable in labouring and suffering for God, and never weary, dejected, or pusillanimous in accomplishing the holy will, and in promoting the honour of God.

6. Interior acts of the will give to the exterior all their virtue, and are to be perpetual, that the soul may live and breathe only by divine love. They are principally made by acts of complacency, of benevolence, of adoration, praise, &c. In acts of complacency we rejoice by love in the infinite happiness and perfections of which God is possessed; that he is infinitely good, infinitely wise, infinitely powerful, and infinitely perfect. By love we feel a pleasure and joy in all the goods which he whom we love enjoys; and if we love God above all things, we must feel greater joy in the sovereign excellencies which we contemplate in him than for whatever we could possess in ourselves. In these sentiments we may say to him: "I praise and adore you, because you are my infinite God, and are alone he that is. I rejoice to consider you so great, so good, so powerful, and so perfect; to see that no creatures could ever alter or diminish your perfections and excellencies; and that all that are or can be must obey your power, and, through your mercy, or through your justice, serve to your honour. How does my soul rejoice that you are the necessary independent being, and that whatever we are or have we necessarily receive from you; and by you and in you we have our

being, which, if you ceased to preserve, we should that moment entirely lose. I am a nothing, but you are the great all; I am ignorance and darkness, but you are infinite wisdom; I am weakness, but you are strength; I am poverty, but you are riches; I am misery, but you are sovereign happiness and perfection. Unite, by your gracious mercy, your greatness, your wisdom, your strength, your riches, your bliss, to my poverty and nothingness, that in you I may rejoice, and my defects be supplied."

7. Offer these, your acts of complacency, in union with those of all the saints in glory for all eternity, but especially in union with those which God conceives in his own perfections, in the infinite knowledge and love of himself, rejoicing exceedingly in this his boundless and holy complacency, which he enjoys in himself, for which we ought to bless, praise, and thank him evermore, and desire him the homage of all his creatures. This is the eternal, the most sweet occupation of the blessed.

8. By acts of *benevolence* we must wish to God, and desire to give him all possible glory, because due to him, and because he is infinitely worthy of it; we must give ourselves up to him without reserve; must praise and bless him with all our strength; and seeing that we are able to do this too imperfectly, we must invite all creatures to join with us in this homage, with the three children: "All the works of the Lord bless the Lord, praise and exalt him for ever"—Dan. iii.; and with David: "Praise the Lord from the heavens, praise him in the heights. Praise ye him, all his angels."—Ps. cxlviii. And as the soul finds all this too little to satisfy her desires, she joins the praises of Christ as man, and, above all, the infinite love of the three adorable persons of the blessed Trinity. God comprehends his infinite perfections, and loves his own excellencies with an infinite love. As the soul will behold God, and love him far more perfectly in heaven, she desires ardently to go thither to praise God, to bless, to love, and serve him perfectly, crying out with the royal prophet: "Take my soul from the prison, that I may confess to thee;" that I may sing your praises night and day, without interruption, and to endless ages.

She flies the least sin far more than death, as the injury and sole evil of her beloved, and she is pierced with grief as often as she sees him offended.

She sings in her heart: "To the King of Ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen."—1 Tim. i. 17. "Blessed art thou, O Lord God! and

worthy of praise, and glorious, and exalted for ages. The God of my father, and I will exalt him."—Exod. xv. 2.

9. But, O God of glory! how shall I glorify you? how shall I praise you? I am not able, nor can all creatures do it worthily. Yet this, my incapacity, overwhelms me with joy in your incomprehensible greatness, because you alone are able to do it. Glorify yourself, therefore, great God; exalt all our own praise and greatness. You know, O Lord! that I most earnestly desire to give you, every moment, all the glory, honour, and praise that your elect, both angels and men, will offer you for all eternity. Accept, at least, my desire and my good will.

I beseech you, O God of glory! and I conjure you by everything that renders you great and glorious, to remove from my heart whatever can be an obstacle to your glory in me; and that you place me in that condition, in which I may be able to glorify you in the most perfect manner. As you see, in the treasures of your infinite wisdom, the innumerable ways by which men may be conducted to you, lead me, if you please, by that which you know may most advance your high glory; whatever that be, it is no matter, provided you thereby inseparably attach me to your holy will, and to yourself, that I may consummate the holocaust of myself in glorifying you.

10. By every breath that I draw, every step that I take, every word that I speak, every thought that I form, I desire to give myself entirely to you, my God, and to pay you as much honour, joy, thanks, and love, as all the angels and men shall be able to give you for all eternity; and I give you this my heart, with all the affection possible. I earnestly beg that you receive and keep it for ever; that you extirpate out of it every other love and affection, that it may be, not a heart, but a furnace of pure flames of your most ardent love.

11. To you do I surrender my heart, to have no other will but yours, resigned without exception to receive whatever it shall please you to appoint. Love even among men produces a conformity of will, and a condescension to the will of one, who is subject to failings and passions: how much more ought I to love and resign myself to your will, always just, most holy, and full of tenderness and mercy? It is just that I should have no will but yours. In this consists my sanctification. "Thou shalt be called my will."—Isa. lxii. 4. My own will is the most insupportable burthen, if I do not renounce it. I rejoice only in finding and following in all things your holy will; I will henceforward

desire nothing but your divine will. In all things this shall be my joy, my light, and the centre of my rest. "My heart said unto thee: My face has sought thee; thy face, O Lord, will I seek."—Ps. xxvi. 8.

## DISCOURSE XVII.

### ON FRATERNAL CHARITY.

1. CHRIST compares the precept of loving our neighbour to the first and great commandment of loving God, and says it is the second great precept, and like to that first; adding, "On these two commandments dependeth the whole law and the prophets."—Mat. xxii. 40. All the other commandments are contained in these two, and are only particular branches of them. For the love of God commands us to honour him, to reverence his name, and to sanctify the time consecrated to his service. And fraternal charity forbids us to kill, to commit adultery, or to defile our own body, to steal, and the rest. Nay, if we speak properly, these two precepts are but one and the same, being one and the same habit, though exercised by different acts, and referred to different immediate objects. For we love our neighbour by charity, not for his own sake, but for God, and for the same motive on which we love God. To understand this, we are to take notice, that the love of our neighbour is two-fold; the one natural, and only a moral virtue, by which we love him through natural and human motives, as for his natural abilities, or for our own interest; whereas reason teaches us to love our brother. The second or Christian love of our neighbour is of a superior order, a supernatural and theological virtue, grounded on faith, and on the supernatural motives of divine charity, viz., for the sake of God, and for his infinite goodness, by which he recommends our neighbour to our love. Hence we love God and our neighbour by the same habit of charity, and upon one and the same motive, as St. Thomas observes. On this account the love of God is necessarily implied in this love of our neighbour. Therefore St. Paul reduces them both to one commandment, when he writes of fraternal charity: "He that loveth his neighbour hath fulfilled the law."—Rom. xiii. 8. And again: "Love is the fulfilling of the law."—v. 10.

2. St. Thomas reckons three conditions as requisite to constitute

the love of our neighbour, fraternal charity. *First*, that it be holy and for God. "He truly loves another," says St. Austin, (Serm. 335), "who loves God in his friend, *i. e.*, because God has commanded it, and has placed his image and his grace in him; or who loves him, that God by his grace and charity may reign in him." Hence the same father infers (Serm. 395), that the natural love of a husband for his wife, of a father for his son, of one friend for another, founded in the sympathy of temper or other qualities, though a moral and necessary virtue, differs entirely from that charity which is commanded us by these words: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." A natural fondness is found even in beasts. "Shall I commend that as something great in a man, which I see in a tiger? If you do not love a son, you are worse than the most venomous serpent," says St. Austin, ib.

The *second* condition is, that it be just, not condescending to another in anything evil. If a friend desires you to favour his passions, he is to be treated as a lunatic; and if you have true charity, you will strive to cure the distemper of his mind, as you would his corporal disease, says the same father, Serm. 335.

The *third* condition is, that charity be true, or with an affection of benevolence. For he who loves another for his own profit or pleasure, does not properly love him, but himself. Hence, the men of pleasure, gamesters, and the like, are far from possessing this divine virtue. For though nothing is more common than love among men, and no one can live without loving something, yet nothing is more rare than charity. For where is he to be found, who loves his neighbour with this true, this just, this holy affection?

3. The love of our neighbour must be *affective*, or sincere in the affection of the heart; and *effective*, showing itself by actions. It must be interior, sincere, and tender; for we are commanded to love our neighbour as we do ourselves; now we love ourselves with an interior and tender love; and such was the love of Christ towards us, which he has laid down as the rule of our love towards our neighbour. "This is my command, that you love one another, as I love you."—John, xv. St. Paul states it as a high pitch of malice to be *without affection* or tenderness. Rom. i. 31. Hence all persons offend against charity, who harbour interior motions of envy, jealousy, or malice; who repine at any good of others, or rejoice at any loss or affliction in them; nay, farther, who do not rejoice in their prosperity, especially in every spiritual advantage; and who do not conceive an inward feeling of compassion in their misfortunes, with an efficacious desire of succouring

them, if it were in their power. Our charity must also be effective, and show itself by external acts of beneficence, alms and fraternal correction; likewise of patience, forgiveness and satisfaction for injuries. We are to succour our neighbour in his necessities, by all the works of mercy both corporal and spiritual, in giving wholesome advice and counsel to those who stand in need of it, by admonishing sinners, and chastising those under our charge, by instructing the ignorant, by comforting the afflicted, in forgiving injuries, by bearing patiently the troublesome, and in praying for the living and the dead; and in relieving all under bodily necessities. So manifold are the miseries of men, both temporal and spiritual, that a man can scarcely stir a foot or turn his eyes without meeting with something to bear, to compassionate, or otherwise to exercise his charity upon, at least in his heart. "Who is weak, and I am not weak?"—2 Cor. xi. 22.

4. The apostle sums up the qualities or marks of this charity, by which we ought to examine our own hearts, that we may see whether we possess this divine virtue. 1 Cor. xiii. 4. We will first consider the negatives, or what it avoids. "Charity envieth not." It wishes every sort of good to every neighbour; rejoices to see it fall to another, as if it was its own happiness; for it regards the success of another as its own. On the contrary, self-love is filled with eager desires, would have all to itself, and looks upon whatever good falls to the share of another as a robbery upon itself. "Charity dealeth not perversely," or doth nothing with malice, is an enemy to contestations, inconstancy, and rashness. "She is not puffed up." She sees nothing in herself but misery and baseness; far from contemning any one, she places herself beneath the whole world. She takes notice only of the virtues of others, and of her own faults and indigence; if she see others sin before her eyes, she thence takes occasion to humble herself the more, being persuaded that she deserves to be still more abandoned by divine grace. To entertain a considerable contempt of any person whomsoever is a grievous sin against both charity and humility; for we owe to every one some degree of esteem and love: and God looks upon himself as despised in the person of our neighbour. "He who despises you, despises me."—Luke, x. "Those who despise me shall be ignoble."—1 Kings, i. What was the crime of the Pharisee who despised the publican? "He went home justified, rather than the other."—Luke, xviii. God frequently treats such arrogant persons, even in this life, according to their own measure towards their neighbour, and

humbles them beneath him as much as they were puffed up above him. Witness Aman and Mardochai; the proud Absalom, and the brothers of Joseph. Such persons become the abhorrence and anathema of all men. But whom are we particularly bound not to despise? In the *first* place, parents; also magistrates and all superiors. Tremble at the judgment executed on Core, Dathan, and Abiron; and on Absalom. *Secondly*, the poor and distressed. "Take care ye despise not one of those little ones."—Matt. xviii. "Whatever you do to one of them you do to me."—Matt. xxv. It is true both of the poor and of superiors: "He who despises you, despises me."—Luke, x. God is especially the protector of those who have no protectors among men. *Thirdly*, we must not contemn any one for corporal defects. This is an ordinary subject of raillery in the world. In such cases charity is moved to tenderness and compassion. How blind is pride, which, instead of thanking God for his blessings, and comforting the afflicted, insults the members of God whom he has afflicted. *Fourthly*, neither must we contemn sinners. They were made to the images of God, and may still be his. *Fifthly*, nor servants. Before God there is no distinction of conditions in the world. Death will equal all the virtuous, and the humble will then be exalted above us. "These are the persons whom he held in contempt," &c. Wisdom, v. 3. God is equally their Father, and will revenge their unjust treatment. "Charity is not ambitious." Far from desiring to supplant others, it looks upon their advancement as its own gain and joy. By it a man is content with the station in which God and his superiors have placed him: grounded in humility, he trembles at the thought of inordinate desires of raising himself, saying with the Psalmist: "Raising, thou hast crushed me." He desires only the glory of God, not his own glory or honour, unless from God, and referred purely to him. "Charity seeks not its own interest." It banishes that excessive attachment to ourselves, by which we study only our own interest or pleasure, and sacrifice to this idol the most essential duties of justice, gratitude, and nature itself. He who seeks his own interest, so as to prefer it to his duty towards God or his neighbour, loves himself more than he does God or his neighbour, and seeks and pursues inordinately his own interest. By this mark alone we may discern how rare true charity is among men. St. Paul could complain even of the days of the apostles: "All seek their own interest, not that of Jesus Christ."—Phil. ii. 21. How much more perceptible is this test now-a-days? Let us

sound our own hearts, and we shall feel the truth of it. How infinitely tender are we in regard to ourselves, yet cold and insensible towards others? Again, "Charity is not provoked to anger." It receives injuries in profound peace and resignation. If sin rouses its zeal, it never loses its tenderness and compassion for the sinner. "It thinks no ill;" having only eyes to see the virtues of others, and a heart tender in excusing at least the intention, when it cannot the action, incapable of rash suspicions, and of putting bad constructions on the actions of others. It finds no malignant pleasure of joy in the humiliation of others, or in sin and injustice; loving God the sovereign justice, it loves only justice, and rejoices in his truth and holy will.

5. We must not think that these negative precepts satisfy the precept of charity; it moreover requires many and weighty positive duties. "Charity is kind," says the apostle: for it teaches us sincerely to esteem, honour, and love our neighbour; to testify our esteem for him by always speaking honourably of him, and treating him with courtesy, not by a base flattery, but with a cordial sincerity; showing him respect, honour, and civility in words and actions, according to his rank; "preventing each other with respect." Though honour be due to superiors, a degree of respect is owing from the king to the meanest slave, as he is a rational creature bearing the divine image, and destined to be a son of God, and heir of his glory. *Lastly*, giving him marks of our sincere love and friendship, of our joy in his prosperity, of our compassion in his adversity, and, on all occasions, of all the good offices and service in our power. The good will and desire of this is called benignity and benevolence; but the performance of them, goodness and beneficence. Hence, charity studies never to offend any one either by word or action; never, by any jests or bantering, to give any one the least pain or confusion, but to behave with an unaffected sincere urbanity and affability to all.

6. "Charity is patient; and endureth all." It receives with submission and cheerfulness all the chastisements and determinations of heaven, as effects of the divine tenderness and mercy; also all that the malice of men can make her suffer. It triumphs over their enmity and injuries by benefits; it is by this that she imitates God, and shows that she is the daughter of him, who is charity itself: she overcomes her enemy by gaining him to herself and to God.

"Charity beareth all things;" according to that important

advice, which the apostle gives in another place in these words: "Bear the burdens one of another, and so ye shall fulfil the law of Christ."—Gal. vi. This duty of bearing whatever is troublesome or disagreeable to us in others, affords continual exercise to charity, and is the most just and most necessary lesson of civil society. We all have our faults; if any one thinks himself exempt from them, this shows him to be guilty of a very great one, and of an intolerable pride. Besides, all men have their humours, ways, and manners, which are disagreeable to many. These are burdens, which the apostle exhorts us mutually to bear. This would be an infallible means of preserving peace, union, charity, and meekness, the greatest comforts of a social life. Our daily quarrels, enmities, and dissensions arise from the want of this spirit. Is it not most just, that, as we desire others should bear our whims, indiscretions, and sallies, we should also bear those of others? But self-love, the great impostor and seducer of the world, persuades us that we injure nobody, and that all we do or say is well done or spoken; but that others are intolerable in their behaviour or manners. Blinded by this cursed self-love, whilst we see motes in the eyes of others, we do not discern beams in our own, and excuse our daily multiplied faults. Thus the Pharisee compared his conceited virtues with the supposed faults of the publican, because he saw imaginary good only in himself, and real faults in others.

> "The seeds of vice spring up in every breast,
> And he, who is least faulty, is the best.
> Be sure to spare the freckles of your friend,
> And, in return, your hump will ne'er offend.
> Justice and equity both loudly plead,
> That all should pardon give, who pardon need."*
>
> HOR. l. 1, Sat. 7.

7. The motives which engage us to this fraternal charity are the excellence and necessity of this virtue. "If any man says, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar. For he that loveth not his brother, whom he seeth, how can he love God, whom he seeth not? And this commandment we have from

> * Nam vitiis nemo sine nascitur; optimus ille est,
> Qui minimis urgetur.——
> Qui ne tuberibus propriis offendat amicum
> Postulat, ignoscat verrucis illius; æquum est
> Peccatis veniam poscentem reddere rursus.

God, that he that loveth God loveth also his brother."—1 John, iv. 21. This love is the fulfilling of the law. It was a precept of the eternal law of nature: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." But Christ has inculcated it in a special and more rigorous manner. He declares, that "to love our neighbour is above all holocausts and sacrifices"; Mark, xii. 33; because it is an act of divine charity; for we love God in the person of our neighbour. This virtue also in some measure belongs to religion; for it honours God in his image. In his last discourse to his disciples, before his death, in which he recommended to them those things which he had most at heart, he made this an express commandment, and often repeated it in the most tender manner: "These things I command you, that you love one another."—John, xv. 17. He calls it by excellency his own, and his favourite precept. "This is my commandment, that you love one another, as I loved you."—John, xv. 12. This shows that he gave to this law a greater strictness and extent; and to express how dear it was to him, he declares it to be his new precept: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you."—John, xiii. 34. He appointed it the mark by which his followers should be distinguished from others. "By this all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another."—John, xiii. 35. It is not by the power of casting out devils, or by the gifts of miracles, prophecy, or tongues, which he gave to his apostles; nor by the other graces which he confers on us; but by this charity that the elect are distinguished from the reprobate. Many wicked will say at the last day: Lord, we have prophesied, and have cast out devils, and wrought miracles in thy name, to whom he will say: "Then I shall confess to them, I know ye not;" Matt. xxvi.; because they do not bear the mark by which his disciples are distinguished, viz., this charity. As if he should say, as St. Austin writes: "Others, who are not mine, have other gifts with you, the gifts of tongues and of prophecy, the sacraments, faith; therefore not in those gifts, though good, but in charity, should men know that you are mine." Our divine Redeemer thrice asked this charity of his Father for his disciples, in the end of his prayer for them after this exhortation: "Holy Father, keep them in thy name, that they may be one, as we also are."—John, xvii. 11. And again: "Not for them only do I pray; but for them also, who through their words shall believe in me; that they all may be one, as thou, Father in me, and I in thee."—John, xvii. 20, 21. And a

third time, v. 22: "That they may be one, as we also are one."

8. Another motive is the example of Christ. He most powerfully excites us to the love of our neighbour, by the excess of his love for us. His very incarnation, birth, and sacred death, all that he preached, all that he suffered, proceeded purely from his charity to us. With what divine patience and condescension did he bear the ignorance, the stupidity, and the failings of his apostles, who were not filled with the Holy Ghost, nor perfect in his knowledge and virtue till after his death? With what meekness did he bear the insults, and answer the captious, ensnaring questions of the Pharisees and Scribes? If he sometimes reproved their vices, even this he did in the spirit of charity. What tenderness and compassion did he not show to sinners, to the sick, and to all mankind? "He went along doing good and healing all."—Acts, x. 38. The excess of this charity appeared in pardoning and praying for his enemies, and in spilling the last drop of his precious blood in redeeming them. This is the model of our love for one another. He himself often inculcates his precept to be, that we love one another as he has loved us. "As I have loved you." And St. John: "My dearest, if God has so loved us, we ought also to love one another."—1 John, iv. 11. And St. Paul: "Be ye the followers of God, as most dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and delivered himself for us."—Eph. v. 1, 2. "We that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves; for Christ did not please himself, but as it is written: "The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell upon me."—Rom. xv. 1, 3. If we considered how Jesus loved us and our neighbour, and how earnestly he recommended him to our love for his own sake, how tenderly should we love every one in him? This made St. Francis of Sales to cry out: "When shall we see the souls of our neighbours in the sacred breast of our Redeemer, and melt in true love for them all? Alas! he who considers his neighbour in himself hazards not to love him purely, nor constantly, nor equally; but then in Jesus, who could not but love him, bear with him, and support his imperfections? Who could find him in that place a trouble or burthensome?" God the Father loves our brother, and delivered his only Son to the ignominy of the cross for him; the Son loves him to that excess, that he died for him; the angels love him; all the just in heaven and on earth love him; and shall not man love him, his brother, flesh

of his flesh, and bone of his bone? No bond can be more sacred than that of alliance in the same blood. "For he is our brother and our flesh."—Gen. xxvii. 27.

9. All men are children of the same father, descending from Adam by the same origin, have the same name, and are linked together in one society by innumerable ties of nature and grace. Every brother bears the image of God; if we love God, we must necessarily love those who belong to God by so close an alliance. "Have we not all the same Father? Did not the same God create us? Why, then, do we all despise our brother?"—Mal. Moreover, he has the same nature with us. Every one loves his own likeness. He is also redeemed by the same blood of Jesus Christ with us; has been regenerated by the same baptism, and made by that sacrament a living member of Christ, a son of God, and fellow-heir of heaven with us. Those who are united with us in faith are more closely united with us in Jesus Christ, our head, in whom we are fellow-members, and by whom we are fed with the same sacraments, and are united in the oblation of the same holy sacrifice. Especially, we are cemented together in the same mystical body of Christ by the communion of his precious blood in the sacrament of the altar. "The chalice of benediction, which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? And the bread which we break, is it not the partaking of the body of the Lord? For we, being many, are made one bread, one body, all who partake of one bread."—1 Cor. x. 16, 17. Shall we not love him who is a son of the same common mother, the Church, who was conceived with us in the same holy font of baptism, and who is fed at the same divine table? To offend or hate him is to revolt against your Father, and to respect neither the common womb of baptism in which you lay, nor all the binding ties of the blood of a God, with which you are nourished.

10. Christ has established his Church one, and will have all its members most closely cemented together, as he and his Father are one. "That they be one, as we are."—John, xvii. 11. He would have his Church to be the most perfect and the most united body that can be. He is pleased to be himself its head. "He is the head of his body, the Church."—Col. i. 18. We are all his members. He who sins against charity, sacrilegiously rends his mystical body, and injures his divine head. "Ye are the body of Christ, and members of his members."—1 Cor. xii. 27. We are fellow-members with each other. We have the most strict, the

most sacred, and the most perfect and inviolable connexions and ties with one another. "As in one body we have many members, but all the members have not the same office; so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another."—Rom. xii. 4, 5. We see that, in a natural body, if the foot be pricked with a thorn, all the other members take their part in the pain, and immediately conspire to relieve the afflicted member. "If the toe be trod upon, the tongue cries out: 'You tread upon me,'" says St. Austin. One might ask it: Why, O tongue, do you complain? you are not touched or hurt, it is only the foot. But it suffers when any part of its body suffers. We, who are fellow-members in the mystical body of Christ, are bound to behave towards one another in the same manner that members do in the natural body. If we saw in this latter the members fighting against one another, the hands to tear the face, the teeth to bite the arm, or the feet to kick each other, we should conclude the person to be mad, and should bind him down in Bedlam. It is a greater extravagance in the mystical body, that one member should deceive, cheat, beat, tear, or backbite another. Yet, this happens daily, and no one is surprised at it. Instead of compassion, how many feel a secret joy of envy or jealousy at the disgrace of another? Even their condolence is often only treachery and dissimulation.

11. Christ's character was that of the Prince of Peace, as he had been styled by the prophets. This the angels sang at his birth. This the primitive Christians observed as their proper badge, when, as foretold, the lamb and the wolf lay quietly together. "The whole number of the believers had but one heart and one soul."—Acts, iv. 32. The heathens, beholding their charity towards one another, cried out in astonishment: "See, how they love one another!"—Tertull. Apol. c. 39. They loved even their persecuting enemies, judges, tormenters, and executioners; they were always ready to receive with joy the loss of goods, friends, and country, and to lay down their lives for the love of Christ, and for the spiritual good of their neighbours. In famines, pestilences, and other calamities, they spared nothing, and exposed their lives to assist the poor and strangers. This was the spirit which Christ asked for his followers. This was the precept he enjoined them, the virtue which he principally inculcated to them. "I give you a new commandment, that ye love one another as I have loved you."—John, xv. 12. This lesson his apostles never ceased to repeat. "But, above all, have mutual charity, which is the bond of perfection."—Col. iv. 14. "Above

all, having constant charity in yourselves."—1 Pet. iv. 8. "Beloved, thus God loved us, and we must love one another."—1 John, iv. 17. This apostle of love, being grown old, reduced all his instructions to the congregations to this one: "My children, love one another." And when the faithful began to be tired, and to desire to hear some other lesson, he returned an answer worthy of John: "Because it is the command of God, and, if it alone be practised, it is enough."—St. Jerome in Gal. c. 6.

12. This charity is its own present reward. "What in the world can be more pleasant or more happy? What more wonderful, than that men from different parts of the world should be so concentrated by a perfect similarity of manners, that there seems to be but one soul in many bodies, and those bodies should be the instruments of one mind."—St. Basil, Constit. Monast. c. 19. This is the special gift of God. "God, who makes people of the same conduct live in the house."—Ps. lxvii. 6. The serenity and peace of mind which this charity brings is the most invaluable temporal blessing. Moreover, love is the life and soul of the world; it is the sun, the salt, and the staff of life. All is dark and comfortless without the light of this cheering fire. Everything is flat and insipid until this seasons it and gives it a grateful relish. All is feeble and tottering without its firm support. "A faithful friend is a strong defence, the medicine of life, and he that findeth him findeth a great treasure."—Eccles. iv. 14, 16. "A brother helped by a brother is like a strong city."—Prov. xviii. 19. "It is hard to break a triple cord."—Eccles. iv. 12. Scilurus, the father of eighty children, lying on his death-bed, gave to them one after another a quiver full of arrows, bidding them strive who would break it. Every one had fatigued himself in vain, when the father, taking the arrows one by one, easily broke them all; giving them to understand that they would be invincible as long as they remained unanimous, but would be weak, and an easy prey to every one if separated. Plutarch, l. de Amore Fratr. apud Stobæum, c. 84.

13. But the spiritual and eternal advantages of holy charity are infinitely superior to those that are temporal. By charity, and by bearing with others, and forgiving injuries, we move God to bear with us in patience, and to pardon us easily our sins and daily transgressions. "Charity covereth a multitude of sins."—1 Pet. iv. 8. It renders a soul most agreeable to God, who chooses her abode in her with a particular complacency. "If we love one another, God abideth in us, and our charity is perfect."—

1 John, iv. 32. It makes us the children of God. "Blessed are the peacemakers, or the lovers of peace; because they shall be called the children of God."—Matt. v. By it we are living images of God, and imitate him. "Be ye imitators of God, as his most dear children, and walk in love."—Ephes. v. 1. It is the property of children to imitate and resemble their parents. This is not a general rule as to earthly parents, who sometimes set bad example, which their children are bound by no means to follow. But God is the most perfect model which we can set before our eyes for our imitation: he is the infallible rule, the sovereign reason, the supreme law; in following him it is impossible we should be deceived. Now in what are we able and bound to imitate God our heavenly Father? Not in his omnipotence, in his creation of the world, or other great attributes, which are peculiar to himself and incommunicable to any other; but it is in virtues, of which our soul is capable, and in which we are to bear his image, particularly in love. By this we are the followers of God, and show ourselves to be his sons; as divisions, slanders, enmities, and the like, are the marks of the children of the devil. "Love your enemies: do good to those that hate you, and pray for those that persecute and calumniate you," says our blessed Redeemer.—Matt. v. 44. He adds the reason: "That you may be the children of your Father who is in heaven: who makes the sun to rise upon the good and the bad, and the rain to fall upon the just and unjust." There is no surer mark that we are the sons of God, than to imitate him in doing good to all men. All creatures pronounce against those, who are not in this disposition, a sentence of condemnation, written with as many rays of the sun, drops of water, and other natural gifts, as God bestows on us. If he had not loved us when we were his enemies, we should never have had the happiness of being his friends, which we shall lose if we cease to imitate him in loving all men.

## DISCOURSE XVIII.

### ON THE ORDER OF CHARITY.

1. We are bound to love all men by the precept of holy charity. All men are the images of God; all men are our brethren; every man is our neighbour in the sense of the gospel. Yet there is a certain order to be observed in charity. God is the lover and the

author of order in all things. Hence, the spouse says: "He hath set his charity in order in me."—Cant. ii. 4. We are bound to love God in the first place, and above all things; "more than father and mother" (Matt. x.), and more than ourselves. We must be ready to lose goods, friends, life, and all things, rather than to be separated from, or to offend him. 1 Cor. xiii. Our charity also is to be regular, and rightly ordered with regard to our neighbours. It commands us to prefer the necessary spiritual good of our own souls to every consideration of the advantage of others. "For it is never lawful to do evil, that good may come from it."—Rom. iii. Though it were, by an impossible supposition, to save the whole world, it would not be lawful to commit the least sin, or to renounce habitual grace, or to forfeit the state of loving God to eternity in the next world. God has enjoined to every one a particular trust and care of his own soul, with a command that in all things he glorify him, and keep his holy law himself. The very precept of charity is, that we love our neighbour as ourselves. Therefore, we are bound to love ourselves in the first place: for the love of ourselves is the rule of the love of our neighbour. Whence, St. Austin says, Serm. 369, n. 5, t. p. 1455: "First learn to love thyself, and so love thy neighbour as thyself." "He that is faithless to himself, whom will he be good to?"—Eccles. xiv. 5. We are commanded to love others as ourselves, *i. e.*, to desire the same good, both corporal and spiritual, to them, which we do to ourselves; but not in the same order. The prudent virgins refused to give their necessary oil to the foolish. Matt. xxii. 9.

2. But we are bound to prefer our neighbour's spiritual life to our own corporal life. For Christ commands us to love our neighbour, as he has loved us, who died for us. John, xv. 12; Ephes. v. 2. He hath laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. 1 John, iii. 16. Hence we are bound to lay down our life, if it be necessary, to procure baptism to an infant that is dying without that sacrament, or to instruct a dying infidel who desires it, or is disposed for it, in the necessary mysteries of the Christian faith. A pastor of souls is obliged, at the expense of his life, not to leave his flock destitute in time of pestilence, famine, or war. Also he is bound, at the hazard of his life, to administer the necessary sacraments to a person dying, who is not capable of supplying the want of them by perfect contrition, and who has been probably guilty of mortal sin. It is an act of heroic charity for any person to expose his life to pro-

cure to another any spiritual help, though not absolutely necessary to salvation. But we are obliged to prefer our own corporal life to that of another. "If any one throw away his own life to preserve that of another, this is not to love his neighbour as himself, but more than himself, which violates the rule of true charity," says St. Austin, l. de Mendac. c. 9, except the other person be the prince or some public person, whose life is necessary to the public peace, or great advantage of the commonwealth; for charity obliges men to prefer the public to their own private good. It is also a lawful and an heroic act of virtue for a man to lay down his own life to save that of another, through any supernatural motive of virtue, as St. Thomas teaches; *e. g.*, for fear the other be not prepared for death, whereas he is careful to dispose himself; or because the other is more useful to the commonwealth, or to the souls of others; or out of gratitude, mercy, or the like. Hence the charity of dying for another man is commended by Christ as heroical: "No one has greater love," &c., John, xv.; and the apostle: "Perhaps, for the good we may brave death" (Rom. v.), which we see confirmed by the examples of many saints.

3. Among neighbours we are bound to prefer, first, a parent; secondly, a wife; thirdly, children; fourthly, relations, according to their degree; fifthly, benefactors, and those on whom we have conferred great benefits, by which they become our creatures, or work in some sense, as St. Thomas observes. But this order may be somewhat changed by certain circumstances; for, if a father or son had attempted the other's life, or been guilty of some excessive unnatural behaviour, he would no longer be necessarily to be regarded in the same rank; though a father or son can never totally forfeit it. Again, those who excel in sanctity deserve a degree of preference in some measure; and we are always to rejoice in the greater felicity of those who are more virtuous.

From these principles we learn when we may be bound to expose our own lives to rescue others from drowning or from the flames; viz., if we prudently fear that they are in mortal sin, and hope that we are disposed for death by charity; or if they be public persons, on whose life the safety of the commonwealth depends. But persons who, by their own free choice and malice, are in danger of an unhappy death, from which they can recover themselves, as those who fight in a duel, or in an unjust war, are not necessarily to be treated as persons in extreme spiritual necessity.

From these same rules we learn whom we are to prefer in saving from shipwreck, hunger, &c., and out of what motives it would be lawful, and an heroic act of charity, to leave the only loaf in a famine, the only plank in a shipwreck, the only horse in a flight from barbarians.

4. We are obliged by the law of charity to love our enemies; for they are still our neighbours. "He who hates his brother is a murderer."—1 John, iii. "But I say unto you, love your enemies, do good to those that hate you," &c.—Matt. v. But the impious and enemies are not to be loved in the same degree with friends, nor are we obliged to show them the special marks of friendship, but only those which we owe to all men in general, as St. Thomas says; who takes notice that the charity of friends is more excellent, because founded in stricter ties; but that of enemies is more heroic and more difficult. We owe charity to the greatest sinners whom we love, whilst we detest their iniquities, as St. Augustin says in Ps. 138. This charity towards enemies obliges us to an interior, sincere affection of the heart. By this we must rejoice in their virtue and just prosperity, and feel a grief and compassion in their afflictions and losses. It is, however, lawful to wish them some temporal humiliation, which may move them to repentance; but this wish or prayer must proceed from charity, without any mixture of revenge, which easily lurks in the heart under blinds; on which account such acts are not to be easily made, especially by the tepid or lukewarm.

5. Besides the interior affection of the will, we owe to enemies all general exterior marks of friendship and good offices, though not those which are extraordinary and due only to friends. But even these are of obligation as to the disposition of the heart, in case they should be in grievous necessity; and in time of a strong temptation to revenge or hatred; to resist which we should make a fervent act of charity, as by praying sincerely for the person; or, if he be present, by showing him some particular respect or civility. This usually ought to be done when we first receive some grievous affront, or when we meet an adversary, at whose sight we feel our heart to recoil. It is to be often repeated, when necessary to root out of the heart some inveterate hatred. Such special marks of friendship are also often necessary to prevent scandal, lest others should think that there subsists something of hatred or antipathy; also, when by them there are hopes of gaining the other to peace and charity. He who affronted another is obliged to ask pardon, and to make satisfaction, as by asking

pardon in public, if he had injured the other publicly by any contumelious words, &c. He is to purpose this before he goes to pray; "before he offers his gift at the altar" (Matt. v.), and to execute it on the first opportunity he can procure. But a superior is never to ask pardon in a manner contrary to his authority. It is an obligation to pardon the offender who sincerely asks it, unless prudence shows it ought to be delayed, to serve as a chastisement; for too easy a pardon of an adultery, fornication, &c., would be a scandalous connivance.

6. It is lawful to demand satisfaction of an injury, and a reparation of honour, providing it be done without the least spirit of revenge. But it is not lawful to demand it by law, if the other offer to make it fully; nor is it allowed in any way to distress him for it by the least unnecessary grievance or charges.

It is not always forbidden to pursue our right in a court of judicature; and it may sometimes be a point of necessity or of obligation, especially in those who are only administrators for others. A man may also owe it to his family and to necessary self-defence. But then lawsuits are always a great evil, and always to be avoided, unless the necessity be absolutely indispensable. St. Paul says: "A servant of God must have no strife."—2 Tim. ii. 24. "Already, indeed, there is a fault among you, that you have lawsuits one with another. Why do not you rather take wrong? Why do you not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?"—1 Cor. vi. 7. He complains grievously that they went to law even before heathen judges; they who, at the last day, were to judge the fallen angels; and reproaches them that they did not compromise all matters among themselves, or find arbitrators among their brethren, who could reconcile their differences. He bids them, by way of reproach, to set them to judge who are the most despised in the Church. "I speak to your shame. Is it so that there is not among you any one wise man that is able to judge between his brethren?"—1 Cor. vi. 5. The first great evil in lawsuits is, that they generally arise from pride or covetousness, as St. James takes notice: "From whence are wars and contentions among you? Come they not hence? from your concupiscences, which war in your members?"—James, iv. 1. The second evil in lawsuits is, that they are the general, and, among the tepid at least, almost unavoidable shipwrecks of Christian charity, the queen of all virtues. They are the sources, and, to many persons, the immediate occasions of innumerable sins against charity. The common phrases of men engaged in such

contests are: he is a cheat, a rogue, and what not. If he be so, this is not to be divulged till he is convicted in open court. But rash judgments, detractions, slanders, contumelies, &c., are the daily and almost hourly thoughts and discourses of such persons. Again, a forgetfulness of God, an insensibility to spiritual things, a great remissness in prayer and every spiritual duty, are the ordinary effects of this desolating evil.

7. How, then, must men behave who are obliged to sustain a lawsuit? They must be engaged in it only by compulsion. They must seek by all means to prevent it, and to bring their adversary to compromise matters, or at least to refer the points to an arbitration of mutual friends, or of prudent, impartial persons. They must be sensible of the extreme spiritual dangers of sin, to which they expose themselves, their friends, their adversaries, their lawyers, and innumerable others; all which will be charged to the account of those who were the rash cause of these evils. They must remember what St. Francis of Sales used to say: "If there be any one who keeps due moderation in lawsuits, you may say that the process of his canonization is already made." They ought, moreover, to compute the loss of friends, of their precious time, and likewise of their money. The excessive expenses, even of those who gain a lawsuit, often put them much out of pocket. Christians are to add in the same scale the racking anxieties and fears, which are the ordinary attendants of lawsuits; the restless nights, the toilsome journeys, the tedious attendance and slavery, the bitter reproaches, the mortal trouble of mind, the incredible fatigues, &c. Let a thinking man call in a skilful arithmetician to cast up, if he be able, all these certain losses and evils on one side, even if he should gain his cause, which must be always uncertain, and then let him coolly sit down and weigh with himself what will be the amount of his gain in the end.

If he doth plead, he must take care to remember that he is a Christian, that he must avoid all rash suspicions and detractions; that he must not conceal any titles which can make justly against him, and favour his adversary; that he must love him sincerely, and show him all the marks, give him all the tokens of cordial friendship, and guard himself against all uncharitableness, all pride, all covetousness.

8. Every Christian sufficiently understands that charity forbids all anger, all desire of revenge, all enmity and hatred, which is an inveterate or continued ill-will. "Every man that hates his brother is a murderer."—1 John, iii. No injuries received, though

ever so atrocious, or multiplied seventy-seven times—no opposition of interests or views, and, still less, no suggestions of pride, can ever excuse the malice of this sin. A Christian is bound to forgive others, as he hopes to be forgiven. Pride may cry out: It would be a blemish in my honour tamely to forgive. David acquired more honour by pardoning Saul in the cave than by all his victories. Cicero shows to Cæsar that it was far more glorious in him to pardon his enemies than to wear the laurels of all his other triumphs. Detraction, whispering, slander, and contumely are crimes against justice as well as against charity. Contumely or reproachful language used to a person's face differs from detraction, as rapine does from private theft; *i. e.*, it adds the circumstance and injury of open violence to that of injustice. The penitent is obliged to repair the injury done by contumely, by making a competent satisfaction, which may restore the honour that was wounded by the affront, as by asking pardon in a manner suitable to the circumstances of the affront, and the condition of the persons. A superior may do it sufficiently by greater marks of favour; and it seldom could be prudent that he should expressly beg pardon of his inferior, which might often derogate from his authority.

9. It is not enough for the observance of this precept to refrain from insults; it obliges us to love and to do good to our greatest enemies. It is a grievous transgression to refuse to speak to, or salute another out of animosity, or to neglect any of the general and common duties of charity which we owe to all; also to except enemies in general from alms or benefaction, much more to except any one in our prayers. It is our first obligation towards our neighbours to pray for them. "Pray for one another."—James, v. 16. Christ teaches us to pray, "Forgive us," not me. If we have our wants, our neighbours have also theirs. Moved with a fellow-feeling for their necessities, we must pray for them as well as for ourselves. If we owe any particular assistance to others, the first is prayer. A wife must pray for a husband, parents for children. You accuse your children of disobedience; perhaps it is your fault, because you have never prayed for them with perseverance. St. Monica obtained by prayer the conversion of her son Austin. The best office which it is in our power to do others is to pray for them. Nothing shows more our want of charity than our great forgetfulness to pray for others. This proves how little interest we take in their salvation. If any one had saved the life of our brother we should think ourselves much obliged to

him, and should for ever extol his goodness, yet we have little anxiety for his eternal life. If we had a brother who stood arraigned for his estate and life, and the judge signified to us that he desired we should recommend our cause to him, could we be so indifferent as to amuse ourselves with trifles, and to make no application, to show no concern or regard for his anger whilst the cause was depending? God, our tender and common Father, desires and admonishes us to intercede with him for our perishing brethren; yet we refuse to do it. What a confusion ought it to be to us to see St. Paul thank God so heartily for the conversion of souls, and pray so earnestly for them, besides all his pains, dangers, &c., for the same end? Yet we do nothing of all that, and, nevertheless, are so backward to pray for them; what answer shall we make to the reproaches of Christ at the last day? The injustice of our enemies ought to move us to greater compassion for their spiritual miseries, and oblige us to pray for them with more earnestness.

10. We must bear the insults and injustice of enemies with meekness and patience. We must learn from Christ how we are to love our enemies and all sinful men, if we desire to be his followers. How did he love Judas, who was his treacherous enemy, and a most abominable sinner? How good, how courteous, how meek was Jesus to him, whom he knew to be the worst of devils? He nevertheless made him an apostle, and sent him to preach with the rest of the apostles. He gave him a power of casting out devils and of working miracles, and he showed him the same kindness, in words and actions, that he did to the other apostles. He washed his feet, he fed him with his precious blood, and preached to him as he did to his other apostles. He did not reprehend him openly; he did not miscall him; he never despised him; never spake ill of him. When Judas betrayed him with a kiss, he called him his friend, and this not by flattery or counterfeiting, but in sincere love and charity. A true lover of Jesus becomes so patient, so humble, so peaceable, that, whatsoever harm or wrong he suffers from others, he never despises them, never judges ill of them, but prays for them in his heart, pities them more tenderly than any other, who never did him any harm; feels his affection more sensible towards them, and more fervently desires their salvation on account of the danger in which he sees them, and of the spiritual profit which accrues to him from their insults.

11. Bear the affronts, harshness, peevishness, rusticity, or

simplicity, and ignorance of others. Be ready to serve all as far as lies in your power; be courteous and affable to all. If any one desire to speak to you, let him be of what condition he will, let him not wait; but consider how ready and glad you would be to speak to an angel of heaven coming to you; and be as cheerful and as ready to speak to your neighbour, who is God's creature, thy brother, and one who, perhaps, by your means will be made a saint. Though you be at your devotions, break them off; this is not to leave God for man, but to find him in your neighbour, whom before you sought in prayer. If he come in trouble and affliction, hear and comfort him; if for alms, endeavour to assist him; at least speak mildly to him; if he be a spiritual man, hear him humbly, and edify yourself by him; if his discourse be worldly or idle, answer little, and he will soon be weary and go away.

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## DISCOURSE XIX.

### ON FRATERNAL CORRECTION.

1. An essential condition of the charity which we owe to our neighbours is, that it be effective, and show itself by actions. Love, if barren of works, is reduced to false compliments of words, and to an empty hypocrisy; for it cannot be sincere and effective, unless it produce its natural fruits. How can a man love his brother, if he has no concern to succour him in his necessities? "If a brother or sister be naked, and want daily food, and one of you say to them: Go in peace, be you warmed and filled; yet give them not those things that are necessary for the body, what shall it profit?"—James, ii. 15, 16. We, therefore, owe to our neighbour the exterior succours and good offices of charity, and these both corporal and spiritual. They are of the strictest precept, if the grievous necessities of others call for them; and they are always excellent acts of this virtue. Men generally seem more sensible of this obligation with regard to corporal alms; but many are entirely strangers to the precept of exercising spiritual works of charity. This is, indeed, a delicate and nice point of morality; and we meet with rocks on both sides to be shunned, but which are, perhaps, little understood. It is necessary that a duty of daily practice and obligation should be perfectly

understood, and cleared of the intricacies and difficulties that occur in it.

2. Both zeal for the honour of God, and charity to our neighbour, oblige us to procure him all spiritual succour and comfort. Zeal; inasmuch as our first duty to God obliges us to study in all things to promote his divine honour, to labour and pray that he be known, loved, and served by all his creatures, a homage which his infinite perfections claim. We are bound to pray—"Hallowed be thy Name." If a dutiful subject desire that his king may reign happy, and that his subjects obey and serve him, how much more is a servant of God bound to pray and to labour, as much as in him lies, that every man may know and serve his God! He is the master of all creatures, why then is not his Name adored by all? Why is there a corner of the earth where he is not known and served? Especially, why are any found among his own children, who ungratefully revile and offend him? We ought, at this reflection, as St. Bernard says, to cry out: "Behold, now in peace the bitterest of all my bitterness. Bitter in the persecution of pagans; more bitter in the fury of heretics; but most bitter in the conduct of the family." This reflection drew floods of tears from the eyes of the faithful servants of God; this moved many to lay down their lives, and to suffer all torments, to labour to prevent one sin, or to promote the love of God in one soul. How pathetically does St. Teresa conjure all her spiritual daughters, never to cease weeping for the offences and injuries which blind sinners daily commit against the infinite goodness of God. L. de Via Perfectionis, c. 3; l. de Castello Animæ, Mans. 7, c. 1.

3. The same consideration calls also for our tears, on the motive of charity towards our neighbour. We are bound to love him as ourselves, and to endeavour to procure for him the same good we desire for ourselves. This holds in the first place with regard to his soul. Christ commands us to love our neighbour even as Christ has loved us, who died for us. John, xv. 12. "He hath laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."—1 John, iii. 15. By this rule, as divines agree, we are bound to expose and sacrifice our corporal life, or whatever temporal advantages we may possess, if this be necessary to the advantage of one other soul. Indeed, one immortal soul is greater than the whole material world. Although a man shall have bestowed an immense treasure of money on the poor, he has done nothing equal to him who has contributed to the salvation of a

soul. This is a greater alms than ten thousand talents—than this whole wide world, how great soever it appears to the eye; for a man is more precious than the whole world. St. Chrys. Or. 3. contra Jud., &c. "Do not say it is but one soul," says the same father; "but remember it is a soul for which all things visible were made, for whom divine laws, statutes, punishments, and eternal rewards were decreed; a thousand miracles and wonders wrought, and mysteries accomplished; for whom God did not spare his only Son. Consider how great a price was paid for one, and despise not her salvation."—Hom. contra Ludos et Theat. t. 6, p. 276, ed. Mont. How earnestly did Moses, Isaiah, St. Paul, and all the prophets and saints reprehend and admonish sinners, grieving for their chastisements more than the blind sinners did for themselves, even amidst their miseries? They loved them, though sinners, more tenderly than a father does his own children; for the sentiment of divine charity far surpasses the bonds of nature. They wept, lamented, and mourned for them even unto death, and made themselves their voluntary companions to follow them to captivity, chains, &c. St. Chrysost. Præf. in Isa. t. 6, p. 1, 2, ed. Mont. They always looked upon it as the greatest happiness to suffer the most cruel torments and death, to procure the salvation, or even the least spiritual advantage of one soul. This is the precept of Christ, and the order of charity established even by the law of nature, if the spiritual necessity of others under our eyes require it.

4. If we are obliged to lay down our lives for the salvation of others, are we not bound to save them, when we can do it by an admonition, an exhortation, a seasonable correction? Only a Cain could say: "Am I my brother's guardian?"—Gen. iv. 9. What have I to do with my brother's soul? Is it my concern what he does, or what becomes of him? This, I say, can be the language only of one who has utterly divested himself of the bowels of charity. "The ass falls and is soon raised up again; a soul perishes, and no one attends to it."—St. Bern. l. 4. de Consid. c. 6. It is an oracle of the Holy Ghost, that "God has committed to each of us the care of his neighbour."—Eccles. xvii. It is, then, an evident divine precept, and an article of our holy faith, that, though the laity are not to usurp the ministry of the clergy, or to commence preachers, all men may be bound under the guilt of mortal sin, in certain circumstances, to admonish and correct sinners, when by that means they may avert the offence of God, and the grievous prejudice of their neighbours' souls. "Reprove a

friend, lest he may not have understood, and say: I did it not; or if he did it, that he may do it no more. Reprove thy neighbour."—Eccles. xix. 13. "Hate not thy brother in thy heart; but publicly reprove him, lest thou shouldst be involved in his sin."—Lev. xix. 17. Christ repeats this law,—Matt. xviii. 15: "If thy brother shall offend against thee, go and reprove him." He mentions the sin of injuries for all sin; for by *against thee* we are to understand, before thee, in thy presence, as St. Thomas observes. "If a man be overtaken in any fault, you, who are spiritual, instruct such a one in the spirit of meekness."—Gal. iv. 1.

5. Not only the obligation, but the great advantages of fraternal correction greatly recommend to us the exercise of this virtue. By it we promote the divine honour, and check the torrents of sin which are broke loose upon the earth like a deluge. What more suitable satisfaction can we pay to God for our past sins? We have offended and dishonoured him. By correcting others from sin let us study to repair his honour, which we have injured. By the same charity, if our brother hear us, we shall have gained him; as Christ says, Matt. xviii.; *i. e.*, as he fell by sin, we shall be instruments to raise him to spiritual life; a far more honourable, more glorious, and more advantageous work than if we had restored his corporal life after death. For by this we save his soul. "If any man of you err from the truth, and one convert him; he must know, that he who causeth a sinner to be converted from the error of his way shall save his soul from death, and shall cover a multitude of sins."—James, v. 20. What could be more glorious? what more profitable either to our brother or to ourselves? To our brother, who is, by our admonishing, saved from eternal death and hell. Christ is the Redeemer and Saviour of men by the great mystery of his incarnation and death. And as God often makes use of creatures or second causes as his instruments, so, even in this greatest of his works, does he vouchsafe to make use of us, to contribute towards the salvation of souls. What can be more profitable to our own souls, to which belong the crown and the eternal joy of so great a work? Could God himself receive anything from a creature, it is here he would be said to do it; for the eternal praises of a soul freed from hell, and made a saint by our endeavours under his grace, accrue to him through us. Thus, also, do we cover and efface our own sins. "Charity covers a multitude of sins."—1 Pet. iv. If he who harbours a just man in the name of a just man shall receive the reward of a just man, how much greater a reward will he receive who has raised a soul

from sin? The spiritual works of mercy and charity far excel those that are corporal.

6. If fraternal correction be a point of such great importance, and of indispensable obligation, it behoves every one to be instructed how and in what circumstances this duty is to be complied with. First, every father, master of a family, husband, magistrate, prince, or other superior, is bound to correct all under his care or jurisdiction by a much severer duty, not only of charity, but also of justice, because he has received authority from God over others for this end, and with this obligation, in the first place, that he employ it to promote his divine honour and service. Moreover, a superior is bound to watch over, and to inquire into the faults of subjects, and to examine their actions and conduct. "What excuse can a shepherd allege who has suffered the wolf to destroy his sheep without his knowledge?" says St. Greg. M. l. 2, Ep. 52. Secondly, a superior is obliged to correct an inferior, unless greater evils are feared, even where he sees little, nay, no hopes of amendment, and where other means relative to this precept are wanting. Hence, God so severely threatens remiss pastors on this account by Ezechiel; and St. Paul said: "I am innocent of the blood of all, for I have not failed to announce every counsel of God to you."—Acts, xix. Upon which St. Gregory writes: "If he had not announced them, he would be guilty of their blood."—Hom. ii. in Ezech. A pastor also is obliged to continue his admonitions opportunely, importunely; and also, if it be necessary, to chastise sin in a salutary manner. No one is allowed to strike or punish another for a fault, though ever so notorious, unless he be a superior, who has jurisdiction and authority, which is always derived from God. But a superior is bound to exercise his power, even in chastising sin, when circumstances require it; "for he does not wear a sword without cause."—Rom. xiii. 4.

7. Private persons are bound not to inquire or pry into the actions of others; which it would even be sinful for them to do, though for the sake of fraternal correction, because they have no authority or jurisdiction over others; and such a prying, inquisitive conduct is infinitely odious and troublesome to others, opens the door to rash suspicions, dissensions, and anger, and disturbs the peace of the whole neighbourhood. This disposition is an effect of pride, and of a want of true charity. St. Austin observes, Serm. 16. de Verbis Domini: "The Lord admonisheth us not to pass over the sins of our neighbours, but to correct them,

if we see them; not by prying to find something to reprove." For, as St. Thomas says, 2. 2æ. q. 33, a. 2, ad 3: "We should otherwise act as spies on the conduct of others, against the known rule, Seek not impiety in the house of the just man, nor disturb his peace."—Prov. xxiv. 15.

Nor are private persons obliged to fraternal correction, where the following conditions do not meet. First, that the fault be certain. To correct others upon light suspicions is to disturb their peace, and ordinarily the way to do harm, and no good. "Before thou inquire, reprove no man, and, when thou hast inquired, reprove justly."—Eccles. xi. c. 7. Secondly, the fault must be of sufficient importance. Usually, to correct others for ordinary venial sins is to lose our authority in correcting, and exasperate, unless it be done by a superior, which is not to be done for trifles, that seem faults to us, but may appear to others innocent. A man who would bring all others to his own rule, would resemble a dancing-master who should pretend to correct the gait of everybody he met in the streets. To love to correct and advise, without sufficient necessity, is to betray a secret pride and self-conceit.

> "When things go ill, each fool dares to advise,
> And, if more happy, thinks himself more wise;
> All wretchedly deplore the present state,
> And that advice seems best that comes too late."
>
> SIR CH. SIDNEY.

Thirdly, if it be prudently hoped that the sinner will himself repent, or will be sufficiently admonished of his duty by another, the obligation ceases. Also, if there be no hopes of doing good by an admonition. But here we must except a superior, who is still obliged to correct the party, that he may deliver his own soul at least, and discharge his duty, Ezech. xxxiii.; or when scandal would otherwise follow from his bad example; or in blasphemies, to repair the injury done to the divine name. Even if the hope of doing good do not much exceed the fear of the contrary, the correction is often better omitted. Hence, strangers are not to be corrected in the streets, except where the danger of scandal be feared, or it be necessary for the sake of God's honour. Fourthly, a proper time and place are to be sought; without this it would be a poison instead of a remedy; as if it were attempted whilst the person was in a passion, &c. Hence the Wise Man often inculcates that it be done in season. Lastly, that we do not ex-

pose ourselves to any very great danger, or loss of life, reputation, or estate by it; but lesser evils are to be despised; nay, life itself, if a neighbour were dying in extreme necessity of such a correction, and it were very probable that he would be saved by it.

8. An inferior ought never to correct a superior by harsh words, contrary to the respect due to him, but only by entreaties and advice offered with due modesty. Ordinarily, it is best to admonish superiors by our manners and good example, at St. Monica gained her husband to God. "She made it her study to gain him to thee by her example."*—St. Aug. Conf. As fraternal correction is a difficult task, we ought not to execute it, in any matter of moment, without first recommending the case to God by prayer, and we must take care to accompany it with a tender charity, mildness, and humility. St. Paul puts us in mind of this, Gal. vi. 1: "You that are spiritual, instruct such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." The remedy is always bitter, and requires great art in the dressing.

9. The pride of man's heart is inclined to recoil at correction. Herod respected and honoured John the Baptist (Mark vi.), heard him willingly, and did many things by his advice; but, when he admonished him of his double adultery and incest, he cast him into prison, and cut off his head. After Christ had attracted the hearts of his hearers by his divine doctrine, by reproving their vices he incensed them against him; "by hearing these things, all in the synagogue were moved to anger, and they rose, &c., that they might kill him."—Luke, iv. 28, 29. So true it is that truth produces hatred. Nothing is a greater proof that a man is disposed to listen to divine grace than if he receive well a reproof, is thankful to his friend who gave it, and endeavours to profit by it. "A reproof availeth more with a wise man than a hundred stripes with a fool."—Prov. xvii. 10. The Holy Ghost gives this as the most sensible mark between a soul disposed to penitence and one hardened in pride and sin. "He that teacheth a scorner doth an injury to himself, and he that rebuketh a wicked man getteth himself a blot. Rebuke not a scorner lest he hate thee. Rebuke a wise man and he will love thee."—Prov. ix. 7, 8. To hate correction and advice is the most dreadful symptom in a soul. "He who hateth correction shall die."—Prov. xv. 10. "He that rejecteth instruction despiseth his own soul;"—v. 32; "but he

* Sategit illum lucrati tibi moribus suis.

that yieldeth to reproof possesseth understanding."—Ib. "The man that with a stiff neck despiseth him that reproveth him shall suddenly be destroyed, and health shall not follow him."—Prov. xxix. 1. Is it not the part of a friend to put us in mind that our face is dirty, or clothes torn? and do not we thank him for his good offices? Much more grateful ought we be to him who admonishes us of blots in our soul. Nothing is more wholesome for the cure of our pride; nothing more useful for the discovery and remedy of all our spiritual evils.

However harshly the draught be administered, we ought to receive it always with gratitude and joy for the benefit we may receive from it. "A wise and well-instructed man will not murmur when reproved."—Eccles. x. 28. But, when we admonish or correct others, let us do it with mildness, which alone gains the heart, whilst harshness shuts it. "Instruct a man of this character in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself."—Gal. vi. It was a saying of St. Francis of Sales: "I have seen innumerable multitudes of flies taken with a little drop of honey, whilst a large quantity of vinegar could never attract one." Nathan reminds David of his sin, introducing his mild rebuke with a parable.

10. Moreover, an order is to be observed in fraternal correction, which Christ expresses, Matt. xviii.: "If your brother offend you, go and reprove him in private; if he will not hear thee, take one or two persons with thee; if still he will not listen to thee, denounce him to the Church." This order is conformable to the law of nature, which commands us to preserve the reputation of our neighbour as much as possible. Wherefore, if a private admonition suffice, no witness must be made use of. Unless a person foresee that his own private advice will not have sufficient weight, he ought not to begin by employing some person of great authority.

If, then, you hear of the fall of any person, make haste to open his eyes and lift him up again. "Run, child, make haste, raise thy friend; close not thine eyes, nor shut thine eye-lids."—Prov. vi. 3, 4.

Correct the proud and obstinate with severity, as St. Paul says of the Cretans: "Rebuke them sharply."—Tit. i. 13. And 1 Thess. v. 14: "Rebuke them that are irregular and disorderly."

The most invincible meekness was the characteristic of our blessed Redeemer, under which he is represented by Isaiah and

the evangelists: "He shall not contend, nor cry out, neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets. The bruised reed he shall not break, and smoking flax he shall not extinguish;" Matt. xii. 19, 20; using a proverb to express his sweetness, his dislike to contention, noise, and bawling, and his gentleness in words and actions. With the most patient silence he bore insults and the most atrocious blasphemies. How comes it, then, that he uses such harsh expressions in reproving the vices of the Scribes and Pharisees? Does he depart from, or forget his spirit of meekness? By no means. Zeal and charity obliged him to use that language in correcting sinners, whose character was pride and obstinacy.

## DISCOURSE XX.

### ON ALMS.

1. CHARITY obliges us to afford our neighbour the succour which he stands in need of for his corporal and spiritual necessities. The latter, indeed, are of far greater importance, of a superior order, and extending their efforts to eternity. But the wants of the body are more sensible, and call upon us for our compassion and relief. There is no duty, no obligation, whether in the law of nature or of the gospel, more evident or more universally agreed on than the precept of alms; yet, so strange is the blindness of avarice, that there is scarcely any precept more transgressed, nor any law which men more shamefully study to elude and misconstrue. Yet the neglect or violation of it is a crime that entails eternal damnation on a soul, and is punished in a particular manner above other sins, with a subtraction of the divine graces and benefits in this life.

2. Many seem to look upon alms-deeds as a virtue of supererogation, or which is left to the free choice and discretion of every one. In this they betray a great ignorance of their religion, and of the first duties of morality; for, by the very law of nature, God lays on us the strictest precept of giving alms to the poor, and it is upon this condition that he has given to the rich their treasures. God is the God of the poor no less than of the rich; he equally created both, and provides for the necessities of both. It would be to charge God with injustice, and impeach his holy

providence, to imagine that he could mean or allow such a division of the goods of this life, that the poor should be left destitute of a necessary subsistence by the rule of his dispensation. Such a blasphemy cannot enter the thoughts of any one who believes in the all-wise, merciful, and holy Providence. How, then, has he supplied the wants of the poor? By the hands of the rich. He has heaped upon them his temporal blessings in abundance, but with a strict obligation that they faithfully relieve the needy. Here we see the secret of his holy providence in the precept of alms: "Let your opulence supply their wants."—1 Cor. viii. 14. Thus, the rich have nothing superfluous, nothing to throw away in extravagance, sensuality, or vanity, nothing to hoard up. Nor are the poor left to perish in distress. "But that equality may have place, as it is written, He that has much does not abound, he that receives little is not in want."—1 Cor. viii. By this admirable wisdom has he appointed a just provision for all, and has furnished both the rich and the poor with the proper means of their sanctification. The rich, by the distribution of their wealth for the relief of the necessitous; the poor, by patience under the inconveniences, humiliations, and sufferings to which that painful state of want, dependence, and contempt subjects them. See, then, you who enjoy the treasures of the world, the law of God in bestowing them upon you. He remembers that he has other children of whom he must take care—children no less dear to him, no less noble in his eyes—he has so far honoured and favoured you as to appoint you his steward to provide for them. But, then, he will demand of you an exact account, and require that you pay him the tribute of his gifts, that you honour him with this homage. "The faithful and prudent servant, whom the Lord has appointed over his family, that he may give them in time a measure of wheat."—Luke, xii. The poor are a part of God's family; you are only his steward to provide for their wants, for he is the common Father of all, and will revenge severely this contempt of his authority, and neglect of his darling children, whom their necessities have commended to us.

3. From this principle we understand how the fathers accuse those rich of theft and sacrilege who neglect to give sufficient alms to the poor. "The bread which you waste belongs to the poor; the cloak you lay up in your wardrobe, the shoes that rot in your house, belong to him who is barefoot. Therefore, you injure as many persons as it is in your power to relieve."—St. Basil, Serm. 4. "But you will say, what injury do I to any man

by keeping what is my own? Pray, how came they to be yours? You came naked into the world, and you shall go naked out of it. Whence came the good things you possess? If you say that they are the presents of fortune, you must be a wicked creature neither to acknowledge the goodness of Providence, nor to thank your benefactor. If you say that God sent them, I would ask you why he sent them? Do you question his justice? Why are you wallowing in riches while your neighbour perishes for want? The only reason to be assigned for this is, that he would have you receive the reward of an honest steward, and he should be crowned for his patience."—Id. Serm. 5. "You call the man thief who steals a coat; what name does he deserve who refuses to clothe the naked when he can?"—Id. Hom. 6, &c. "It is as great a crime to refuse necessaries to the indigent as to rob the rich."—St. Ambrose, Serm. 81, t. 5, p. 898. "You give not from your own, but from the common stock. The world belongs to all, not exclusively to the rich. You pay a debt, not a gratuity."—Id. l. de Naboth., c. 12. See St. Maximus, Serm. 7, t. 2, p. 553, &c.; St. Chrysost. Conc. 2. de Lazaro; St. Bernard, &c. "Defraud not the poor of his alms, hear his entreaties, and pay your debt." Eccl. iv. 8. The earth affords him not a subsistence. God has provided for him by assigning him a patrimony on your superfluity. He commanded tenderness even to brutes, whence he forbade the ox to be muzzled who was treading the corn, &c. "The just man considers the nature of the brute creatures, but the wicked are cruel."—Prov. xii. 10.

4. God renewed this precept in his positive law to the Jews: "I command thee to open thy hand to thy poor indigent brother."—Deut. xv. 11. "This was the crime of Sodom; they opened not the hand to the poor and indigent."—Ezech. xvi. 49. But in the new law, which is properly the law of charity, this precept of alms-deeds is enforced with particular energy. Christ inculcates it in the strongest terms; the sermons and writings of the apostles were a continued echo of the same doctrine; all the fathers and pastors of the Church vehemently press this obligation; and the saints made the heroic practice of this admirable virtue the rule of their conduct, looking upon it as their duty to strip themselves of all things to clothe the naked and to feed the hungry. Our blessed Redeemer commands that by mercy we resemble our heavenly Father. "Be merciful, as your heavenly Father is merciful." We cannot be entitled to the crown of heaven if we are not the children of God. "He has given us a

title to become the children of God."—John, i. 12. And to be the sons of God, we must represent his image in ourselves, and be the copies of him who is the Father of mercies and the Father of the poor. He created us out of nothing; gave us our being, these heavens and this earth, with all the other gifts of nature and grace which we enjoy, out of pure goodness and bounty; but he exacts of us that we imitate his beneficence towards our fellow-creatures. This is the great and sublime original which we are commanded to copy after. "The charitable man is truly the image of God," says Clemens of Alexandria.

Christ also has shown himself in his mortal life as a model for imitation. "He went about relieving and healing."—Acts, x.

5. Our divine Saviour teaches the same precept, by always inculcating that we are only stewards and dispensers of the temporal goods with which we are entrusted. Our Lord is compared by him to a master who is gone into a foreign land, soon to return, and call us to give an account of our stewardship. Suppose a great prince should, during his absence, leave his estates in the hands of his eldest son, but with an express order that he should take care of his family according to their dignity; instead of which this son should appropriate the whole revenue to his own use, and to feed his extravagances, what would be the chastisement due to his crimes? Would such a father be satisfied if, upon his return, he found him lodged in palaces, served in rich plate, attended by troops of servants, feasting on dainties, and rioting in superfluous pleasures and vanities, whilst his brothers were left abandoned by him, some starving naked on the highway, others sick in the public hospitals, destitute of every succour or comfort, others in prison or in slavery for debt? How justly would they cry out for justice against the cruelty of him who not only abandoned them to such distress, but was deaf to the daily cries and complaints by which they never ceased to implore his compassion? Doubtless the father would restore them to their birthright, and would disinherit and cast into chains the unfaithful and ungrateful steward and eldest brother. This is what we are taught by the parable of the bad rich man and Lazarus. Luke, xvi. The rich man was clothed in purple and fine linen, and feasted sumptuously every day. Lazarus was a poor beggar who lay at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be filled with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table; and no one gave him anything. Moreover, the dogs came and licked his sores. But lo! the beggar died, and was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom;

and the rich man died, and was buried in hell. We read of no other cause of his damnation than that of hard-heartedness to this poor man, and his superfluous extravagance in his own pleasures and vanity. He regarded not Lazarus as his younger brother, and suffered him to perish in his distress, whilst he looked upon his estate as his own right, a patrimony for which he was to give no account, and in which he might riot himself as he pleased; dogs, horses, servants, instruments of vanity and pleasure, made continual demands upon him, and he had nothing for a brother who was entitled to a subsistence through his hands.

6. But nothing renders this important truth more sensible or more dreadful than the sentence of the Great Judge at the last day. The wicked he will sentence to eternal flames, in punishment of their neglect of this precept. "For I was hungry," will he say, "and you gave me not to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me not to drink; I was a stranger, and you took me not in; naked, and you clothed me not; sick and in prison, and you did not visit me."—Matt. xxv. Are there, then, no other crimes, for which wicked men will be damned, save only this of uncharitableness to the poor, that the Judge mentions this alone? Or is this a crime more enormous than sacrileges, perjuries, blasphemy, or scandal, that they should find no place in this sentence? They certainly are crimes more enormous in themselves; yet this sentence obliges us to confess that the neglect of alms is a most grievous sin, which suffices alone to damn souls, and which is a general sin of the wicked. The precept, then, must be extremely severe, and few satisfy their duty in complying sufficiently with it. "O!" cried out St. Gregory Nazianzen (Or. 16. de Amore Pauperum), "that left hand affrights me, and those more than killing reproaches, which the wicked shall hear from the mouth of the Judge; not that they have unjustly seized the goods of others, nor that they have plundered the altars, or committed any other like crime; but that they have not relieved Christ in his poor." And St. Chrysostom (Hom. 6. in 2 Tim. t. 11, p. 695, ed. Ben.) says: "The virgins were not accused of fornication, or of adultery, or of envy, but that they had not oil, *i. e.*, did not give alms. Likewise, those who are damned and sentenced to everlasting fire are accused of no other thing than that they have not fed Christ. Do you see that the sole omission of alms may damn souls? Do you fast every day? Those virgins also fasted, yet this availed them not. Do you pray? Prayer is fruitless without

alms-deeds; without which all things become unclean, and the greater part in every virtue perishes."

7. That the precept of alms strictly obliges every one under the guilt of mortal sin, in the following circumstances, all divines agree. *First*, if another be in extreme want—that necessity we call extreme, in which a person is exposed to the danger of death, or of being grievously maimed, or the like; and that is called a grievous necessity, in which a person is in danger of suffering some very great detriment in his temporal estate; a common necessity is that which we ordinarily find in beggars. If we know any brother to be under extreme necessity, or to be in danger of perishing by hunger, cold, or the like, we are bound to relieve him, though we part with what is necessary for the support of our state or condition in the world. Also because, when a person falls into extreme necessity, all things become common; the law of the inequality of fortunes or conditions ceases, and every man has a right, of justice, to a supply of his present extreme necessity from the property of others. In this case it is strictly true: "If you do not relieve, you kill."—St. Ambrose, l. Offic. Relat. cap. 21. This is a case much more frequent than many imagine. Many perish for want in the streets, in their cottages, on the highways, by famine, by cold, by injuries, in their sick beds, &c. Pastors, magistrates, and other superiors are obliged to seek out such objects, and carefully to watch against such dangers, especially in the cases of bashful poor, who are ashamed to make known publicly their necessitous circumstances, as is observed by St. Ambrose, Offic. 1, c. 30, t. 4, p. 448; St. Aug. Serm. 3. in Ps. 103, t. 4, p. 1157; St. Chrysost. Hom. 21. in Rom. &c. This is to be understood, when the person has proved his necessity to be real and extreme; without which condition we are not too easily to believe the tales of strollers. Nor is any man bound to go about the world in quest of such necessitous objects; it suffices, if he relieve those he meets, and is careful to discover and assist the bashful poor, who fall in his way, as St. Thomas teaches; 2, 2æ, q. 71, a. 1.

8. If we meet another labouring under any grievous necessity, though not extreme, we are bound to succour him, by giving what we can subtract from our fortunes, without sinking our family or rank in the world; otherwise we cannot sincerely love either God or our neighbour; for to love our neighbour is to desire, and, as much as in us lies, to procure his good. "Let us not love in words and the tongue, but by deeds and in truth.

He that possesses worldly wealth, and seeing his brother in want, shuts his bowels against him, how can the love of God be in him?"—1 John, iii. And in the last sentence on the reprobate, Christ would not have mentioned in particular this precept, had not its mortal transgression been most frequent, and the omission of a duty most dear to him.

9. All persons who enjoy fortunes which are superfluous or unnecessary to themselves, are bound to bestow them on the poor, according to Bellarmine, Sylvius, and the most general opinions of divines. "Command the rich, to give freely."—1 Tim. vi. 17. "Let the person who has two coats give one to him who has none, and let him that has food do the like."—Luke, iii. 11. St. Jerome writes: "If you have more than you want for raiment and food, give it away, and consider yourself as discharging a debt."—Ep. ad Hedibiam, qu. 1, p. 171, t. 4. ed. Ben. Most men, indeed, complain that they want for themselves, far from finding anything superfluous or to spare; but if they carefully look into their own consciences they will find that they are only the demands of luxury, of pride, of the love of delights, vanity, and extravagance, which they call wants. "What we think necessary is often superfluous. But if we seek superfluities, we shall never have enough. Brethren, ask what sufficeth for the work of God, not what will satisfy your avarice."—St. Aug. in Ps. 147, n. 12, p. 1658, t. 4.

It is not, indeed, unlawful, and may be a part of virtue, and commendable, that a person not in opulence augment his fortune in the world for the support of his family, providing that neither ambition nor avarice has any share in his heart, and that in the mean time he give plentiful alms. But there is often great danger, lest covetousness cloak itself under a pretence of virtue or necessity, to make avarice, vanity, or sensuality pretences for not having superfluities: "it is a robbery—it is a sacrilege; what you thus lavish is ours."—St. Bernard.

10. Those who have nothing which can be deemed superfluous to their state, or the necessary and simple support of their family and dignity in the world, are still bound to subtract something from themselves for the use of the poor. "If you abound in wealth, give away abundantly; if you have but little, still give cheerfully."—Tobias, iv. 9. "The man who shuts his ears to the entreaties of the poor, shall himself implore, and shall not be heard."—Prov. xxi. Let a man save from his necessary expenses only two farthings, with the widow in the gospel, and give them

cheerfully; or let him, with the widow of Sarepta, a poor woman, an alien from the people of God, a barbarian, a mother of children, divide her little stock with Elias, *i. e.*, with the poor, as St. Chrysostom elegantly exhorts, Hom. 19. in 2 Cor. t. 10, p. 576, ed. Ben. That father often exhorts, that if a man has nine children, he should still count God, *i. e.*, his poor, for a tenth; for what would he do if he had still a tenth child? He would maintain it. St. Austin says: "Have you children? Add one to the number. Give something to Christ."—In Ps. 38, t. 4, p. 313. "They lay up for their children, these hoard for their offspring, and they for theirs. Who thinks of Christ? Who provides for his soul? All goes to their children. Let them remember that besides the children they have here, there is another in heaven. To him they owe all; let him, at least, have his share."—Id. in Ps. 48, n. 14, p. 433. We must, indeed, know, that virtue requires the honest improving of our stock, of our thrift, and all opportunities of lawful gain and good husbandry, without uneasiness, eagerness, or the bent of passion. For this is the proper foundation of all liberality and alms, to make the best use of the just means of gaining, that so we may have the ability of expending, upon convenient and necessary occasions, either of rewarding such persons as deserve well, or of relieving the necessitous. Liberality and frugality are but one virtue; for without frugality liberality is profuseness, and without liberality frugality is avarice. There is only this difference, that liberality is seen in giving, and frugality in saving; and both concur to make up the same virtue. A man is not to injure his family by lavish liberality, against that justice which he owes to his own, but to retrench from superfluities in table, dress, or diversions, that he may reserve a portion for Christ in his poor. It is the advice of St. Chrysostom, that he lay by the tenth part of his gains or revenues for this purpose. Far from dispensing a man from giving alms, it is the remark of St. Cyprian (l. de Op. et Eleemosynis), that a great number of children ought to oblige a man to give the larger; for the "sins of many are to be redeemed; the souls of many are to be saved." We must always remember that "the superfluities of the rich are the necessaries of the poor; we keep what is not our own, if we retain what is superfluous."—St. Aug. in Ps. 147. "He that possesses the wealth of this world, and seeing his brother in want, shuts his bowels against him, how can the love of God abide in him?"—1 John, iii. 13. "Never forget the duties of benevolence and

compassion; for by such sacrifices heaven is obtained."—Heb. xiii. 16. What of those who by exactions oppress the poor? "Was it not enough for you to enjoy plentiful pastures, without diminishing what was left!"—Ezech. xxxiv. 18.

## DISCOURSE XXI.

### ON THE ADVANTAGES OF ALMS-DEEDS.

1. The incomparable spiritual advantages annexed to the practice of alms-deeds ought infinitely to recommend it to us, though it had not been enjoined us by any precept. God being bounty itself, and infinite bounty, requires that we in our poverty imitate this attribute of his goodness to the best of our abilities. He, therefore, has established this rule in the distribution of his graces, that he will proportion his liberality towards us to that which we show to our fellow-creatures. "Give, and it shall be given to you; good measure, and pressed down, and shaken together, and running over shall they give into your bosom. For with the same measure that you shall mete, withal it shall be measured to you again."—Luke, vi. 38, &c. Now, we see the conditions under which all the graces of God are offered to us; viz. if we are liberal to the poor in alms-deeds, if we imitate this divine virtue. Whatever, therefore, we do for our neighbours, we do incomparably more for ourselves; for we receive from God much more in return than we give to our brother. Should not we thank a person, and think we had great obligations to him, if he should offer to us his ground to till for our own profit to reap an hundred fold, which would suffice to enrich us for our whole lives? We are more obliged to our brother, when we are so happy as to do him any service; for in his field we reap as plentiful a crop as we please, and lay up stores for eternity. It is, then, most true that he who gives alms receives the greater benefit, and is incomparably the greater gainer.

2. By alms he moves God most readily to hear his prayer. "Break thy bread with the poor, and invite the indigent into thy house; when you see a naked person clothe him, and despise not thy own flesh. Then shalt thou call upon God, and he shall hear thee; thou shalt cry out, and he shall say, Behold, I am here." Isa. lviii. "Hide thy alms in the bosom of the poor, and it shall

obtain thy pardon."—Eccles. xxix. 15. If we are deaf to the cries of the poor, we make God shut his ears to our cries. "He who shuts his ears to the cries of the poor shall himself cry out, and shall not be heard."—Prov. xxi. 13. "Injure not the widow and the orphan. If ye hurt them, they will call upon me, and I will hear them."—Exod. xxii. 22. St. Chrysostom having taken notice, as he went to the church at Antioch, that many who were able to relieve the poor passed by them, while in great distress lining the streets, said in his sermon: "After such inhumanity, we dare lift up our hands to heaven to implore mercy and the pardon of our sins; do not we rather fear lest, after our prayers, thunder should fall upon us and crush us? Do not we tremble lest that poor person, whose miseries we despised, should seem to appear to us in our sleep in the night, and reproach us for our cruelty, as I have heard several say they had seemed to suffer in dreams, through the remorse of such a crime. Though these were only dreams, and a transient suffering, do not we dread lest we may some time see that poor man in Abraham's bosom, reproaching and condemning us?"—Serm. 5. in Genes. ex. 8, t. 5, p. 649, ed. Ben. St. Peter Chrysologus writes, Serm. 2: "Man, give earthly substance to receive heaven; God requires you to be merciful to your fellow-creatures, and promises heaven." "Give, and it shall be given to you."—Luke, vi. 38. Give what? That which rust consumes, which thieves, or a thousand accidents, may rob you of, what you cannot carry with you, what only feeds your passions. "And it shall be given to you." What? Grace, and an eternal crown.

3. Alms-deeds have a particular virtue to purge away sins, and to obtain of God the great gift of sincere repentance. When King Nebuchadnezzar was threatened by God with the most dreadful chastisements for his pride and other crimes, the prophet Daniel gave him this advice: "May my advice not offend thee, O king! redeem thy sins by alms-deeds, and thy iniquities by relieving the poor."—Dan. iv. 24. The hypocrisy, pride, scandal, and other crimes of the Pharisees had drawn from the mouth of our merciful Redeemer the most terrible denunciations of the Divine vengeance; yet he tells them, "Give alms, and behold all is clean to you."—Luke, xi. This we may address to all sinners: you, who have wallowed in the filth of impure pleasures; you, who have defiled yourselves by beastly drunkenness; you, who have, by your usuries and extortions, oppressed the necessitous; you, who have, by your pride and presumption, attacked heaven

itself, redeem your crimes with alms, and behold all things are made clean to you. Join liberality to the poor with fervent prayer, to beg of God a sincere conversion of heart, and you will certainly be so happy as to obtain that infinite mercy; and accompany your tears of repentance with continual alms, and these, joined with true penitence of heart, will expiate your offences, and wash away the deepest stains of your soul. "Break thy bread with the hungry; then shall thy light break forth like the morning, and thy cure shall soon follow."—Isa. lvii. "Thy cure, that is, the remission of all thy sins," says the gloss. "By good works the sinner is saved from everlasting perdition, as by these he is disposed to obtain the grace of repentance."—St. Thomas, 2, 2æ, q. 143, a. 2, ad 5. Whence, divines teach, that penitents and all sinners lie under a special obligation of giving larger alms. "The fiercest fire is extinguished by water, and alms-deeds resist sin."—Eccles. iii. 33.

4. In this sense alms-deeds obtain mercy in the terrible day of judgment, and deliver the sinner from everlasting torments. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."—Matt. v. The angel Raphael said to Tobias: "Prayer is good with fasting, and abundantly better than treasures, because alms save from death, and remit sin, and lead to eternal life."—Tob. xii. "Judgment without mercy to him who shows not mercy. But mercy surpasses judgment."—James, ii. "We shall appease God by our liberality to the poor. Give unto the poor, and thy Judge is softened."—St. Chrys. Hom. de Pœnit. Whence it is often said, that a man of great alms-deeds will never perish everlastingly; but this we must understand of alms given out of the motive of perfect charity. St. Austin writes of this virtue: "Mercy attends at the gates of hell, and suffers no merciful person to be thrown into it."—Hom. 39. inter. 50. Thus, the prayers and alms-deeds of Cornelius, the centurion, deserved that God should send an angel to conduct him to the true faith, rather than he should perish. "Thy alms and thy prayers," said that ambassador from heaven to him, "have ascended and are recorded in heaven."—Acts, x. 4. When Tabitha, a holy widow, was dead at Joppa, all the widows surrounded St. Peter, showing him the garments she had made for them."—Acts, ix. 39. This moving sight, joined with the tears of so many whom she had relieved, moved St. Peter miraculously to restore her again to life by prayer. In like manner do deeds of mercy plead before the tribunal of Christ in favour of sinners; the poor relieved by them

are advocates in their behalf, and move the Judge to show mercy to them, who were themselves lovers of mercy. This Christ teaches by the parable of the unjust steward, Luke, xvi. But this is most especially true of those works of mercy which tend to the advancement of religion and piety, and which promote the honour of God and the salvation of souls. The pious Jews used a most powerful recommendation to our Blessed Saviour in favour of the centurion, whose servant was sick, when they said: "And he has built us a synagogue."—Luke, vii. 5. Whilst our sins call for justice, these works of mercy will disarm it, and induce the Father of Mercy to wait patiently, and to convert our souls to him. They will cover, at the last day, a multitude of iniquities, will give us confidence whilst the heavens tremble, and will make the countenance of the sovereign Judge lay aside its terrors, and display towards us all the charms of sweetness and tender mercy. "Happy is the man who attends to the poor and indigent; in the evil day God shall deliver him."—Ps. xl. 1. "The evil day to sinners is the day of judgment. However, you pass by the poor, and treat them worse than your dogs; they are plentifully fed, while the beggar perishes through want. But you reap some benefit, receive some services from friends and servants. What if I should convince you that this poor person is of more service to you than all of them together. He will attend you at the judgment-seat, he will save you from fire, which your servants and the whole world cannot do. Who raised the dead Tabitha, servants or the poor?"—St. Chrysostom, Hom. 11. in Heb. p. 116, t. 12. "Alms-deeds free from all sin, and deliver from death, and shall not suffer a soul to be lost. Those shall be inspired with confidence in the presence of God who give alms," said Tobias to his son. Tob. iv. 11, 12.

5. Alms purchase heaven, and lay up there a great treasure, which will never fail. Consider the last sentence to the elect: "Possess the kingdom—for I was hungry, and you gave me to eat, &c."—Matt. xxv. 35. Whence Christ, exhorting us to alms-deeds, says: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth; where rust and moth consume, and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither rust nor moth doth consume, and where thieves do not break through nor steal."—Matt. vi. 19, 20. Hence, what we throw away on luxury and vanity we properly give to the devil and to the world; what we lay out according to the rules of the Gospel, simplicity and frugality, in making the necessary provi-

sion for our family, we give to justice; but what we spare from our necessities to bestow on the poor, is laid up for ourselves; this is a treasure sent before us, and deposited in heaven; it is a bank, which will repay us with interest to eternity. "Money given to the poor is lent to God."—Prov. xix. 17. How solicitous are men to increase their fortunes and to improve their stock? How do they embrace an opportunity of putting out a loan to great advantage? Here, we place it to produce an eternal and unspeakable interest, and for our security have the bond of a God that it shall never fail. We read in the "Spiritual Meadow," c. 201, that Synesius, the Bishop of Cyrene, gave his bond to Evagrius, a philosopher, who had lately embraced the Christian faith, that he should receive from God, in the world to come, a hundred fold interest for three hundred pieces of gold which he gave to the poor. The philosopher, on his death-bed, ordered the bond of the bishop to be put into the coffin, and buried with him. But appearing afterwards to the bishop, he ordered him to open his grave, and take back his bond, together with an ample receipt, for he had received incomparably more. Tillemont in the Life of Synesius, t. 12. We have this assurance by faith: "Whoever gives a cup of cold water to a disciple, in the name of a disciple; yea, I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward."—Matt. x. 42.

6. Christ, to recommend this virtue in the strongest manner, declares, that whatever we do to the poor for his sake, he accepts as done to himself. "He that harbours one of these little ones in my name, harbours me."—Matt. xviii. 5. And in the last sentence, he will tell the good, that they visited him sick and in prison, and fed and clothed him, adding: "Amen, I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me."—Matt. xxv. 40. And the wicked he will reproach, that they neglected to visit, feed, and clothe him, saying: "As long as you did it not to one of these least ones, neither did you do it to me."—Matt. xxv. 45. It was a great comfort and happiness to the primitive faithful, to be able to harbour and entertain the apostles; by which charity they shared in the fruit of their labours, and of the conversion of the world. "He that receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive the reward of the prophet; and he that receives a just man shall receive the reward of the just."—Matt. x. 41. St. Paul congratulates Philemon, as for the greatest happiness and virtue, that "the bowels of the saints have rested by thee, brother."—Philem. v. 7. But Christ enhances the value of the least action of charity exercised towards any neighbour, when

he declares that it is done to himself. Happy do we esteem those holy persons, who served Christ in his state of mortality, received him under their roofs, ministered unto him with their own hands, and furnished him and the holy college of his disciples with food or raiment. "They ministered to him out of their stock."—Luke, viii. If a king would have the pleasure of receiving alms from a subject, he would be obliged to disguise himself; for who would presume to give him a morsel of bread whilst on his throne, and in the midst of his court? Thus Jesus, our divine head, becomes indigent in the necessity of his members, and weak in their weaknesses, that we may serve him in their persons. St. Martin, whilst a soldier, met in the middle of a severe winter, at the gates of Amiens, a poor man almost naked, begging alms of those that passed by; he saw no one give him anything, or take notice of him; and he had nothing about him but the cloak which he wore, for he had already bestowed everything else on other poor persons. He therefore drew his sword, and cut his cloak in the middle into two halves; with the one part he wrapped himself, the other he gave to the poor beggar. Some laughed at him in this awkward attire; others reproached themselves, that they, who had plenty, had given the poor man nothing. The night following, in his sleep he saw Christ, who appeared clothed with the half of the garment which he had bestowed on the poor man, and heard him say to a troop of angels which surrounded him: "Martin, still a catechumen, clothed me with this coat." After this vision he hastened to receive the holy sacrament of baptism, being eighteen years of age. Sulpitius Severus in Vit. S. Martin, l. i.

7. What motive could be more powerful to press the love of this virtue on us? "Let us not say that he is unworthy and undeserving, a wicked and base fellow. Though he be unworthy, he is a member of Christ, who receives a benefit conferred on him as if done to himself. This consideration furnishes us with four powerful motives. He is most worthy who asks; for it is the Lord himself. The poor man for whom he asks is pressed by urgent necessity: it is easy to bestow what he asks; he begs a little bread, not anything to feed vanity or luxury. The recompence promised is exceeding great, even the kingdom of heaven. These are motives which might move a heart of stone, and excite a soul, though of all others the most covetous, blind, savage, devoid of pity, and stupid. But I will add something still stronger. Let those initiated by baptism, and admitted to the divine mys-

teries hear me. Christ has not spared his own flesh or his own blood; but has given them to nourish us. And you will not give a morsel of bread or a cup of drink for his sake. What pardon do you deserve? Moreover, what you refuse to give to Christ, to your great advantage, you perhaps give to the devil, to your great detriment. If you hoard it up, either thieves or other accidents, or at least death, robs you of it. Choose rather to lay it up in a treasury not exposed to robbers."—St. Chrys. Hom. in illud, Vidua eligatur, p. 327, ed. Ben. t. 3.

8. Christ honoured the condition of the poor; was born, lived, and died in the most severe poverty; pronounces the poor blessed; and shall not we, for his sake, regard that condition with tenderness?

We are bound to love and assist the poor, even as men of the same flesh and blood, and descending from the same father. "We are all brethren."—Tertull. The very sentiments of nature inspire us with compassion for their miseries. We are bound to do this far more as Christians. But we pretend that we have nothing to spare. Alas! what superfluities do other impartial eyes see in fine clothes, in lodgings, in dainty and multiplied dishes? The decency of rank requires not all this; the simplicity of the Gospel condemns it. I say nothing of criminal expenses in excesses, in drinking, in balls, theatres, and the like. Even the Turks, the most rapacious of mortals, are obliged, by their law, to give very large alms, in which they are so punctual, that beggars are seldom seen among them. The laws oblige all to give large sums for this purpose; as (*e. g.*) a merchant to give one part out of forty of his gains. They call alms in the Alcoran, *Elzecah, i. e.*, justice, or acts of obligation and debts. The poor, when they beg, commonly say, not give me alms, but give me God's right, or what is due to God. *Haag Allah.* Jovet. Hist. des Relig. t. 3, p. 110.

Alms must be accompanied with liberality, charity, justice, and prudence.

9. They are to be more diligently given in times of penance, prayer, and devotion, especially during the holy fast of Lent, as the Fathers and the Church in her office of that season demonstrate. On Sundays it was the custom in the primitive Church for all to bring some alms, if possible. "Thou art rich, and dost thou think that thou keepest holy the Sabbath Day, who never castest an eye on the poor's box," says St. Cyprian, l. de Opere et Eleemosynis. St. Paul exhorts every one to lay up something for

the poor on every first day of the week or Sunday. "On the first day of the week, let every one of you put apart with himself, laying up what it shall please him."—1 Cor. xvi. 2. The apostle directs this to be done by every one at home. Shortly after this, contribution of alms was made in the church every Sunday. St. Justin, Apol. 1, mentions that every one that was willing gave something to the treasury for the poor, according to his own discretion. Tertullian speaks of the same, adding: "No one is compelled, but every one gives what he pleases. These are the deposits of piety. They are employed in feeding the poor, the orphans, abandoned aged persons, those who have suffered by shipwrecks, who are sentenced to the mines, are in banishment or in prisons."—Apolog. c. 39, p. 31, ed. Rig. Theodoret says that the quantity was left to every one's discretion, as the apostle mentions; yet teaching that God gives his blessing to those who choose the best sacrifices, and offer them most cheerfully. 1 Cor. xvi. St. Chrysost. Hom. 43. in 1 Cor. t. 10, n. 401, 402, ed. Ben., says: "St. Paul exhorts the Corinthians to this by the example of all the churches; also for the sake of the day; for the Lord's Day calls for our charity. He says not absolutely, let this or that person, but let every one, rich or poor, servant or master, lay up something. Some will say, be not troublesome; leave it to the choice of every one to do as he pleases. You make us blush. But the apostle was not ashamed always to mention this duty; nor did he fear being troublesome by taking upon him to speak for the beggars, and in their place. If I said: Give it me, perhaps I should blush. But now I only entreat for the poor; nay, not so much for the poor, as for your sake who give the alms; therefore I speak boldly. What shame is it to say: Give something to the Lord, who is hungry; clothe him, who wanders naked; harbour the harbourless? He, who can want nothing for his own person, will say before the whole world at the last day: 'I was hungry, and you did not give me to eat.' And shall I be ashamed to speak of it? God forbid. Such a shame would be a snare of the devil. I will therefore speak, and will cry out with a louder voice than the poor themselves: Give to the necessitous." In the primitive ages every church had always a collected depositum, which was very considerable. That of Rome, under Pope Cornelius, A.D. 250, maintained one hundred and fifty-four clergy, and one thousand poor, out of the treasury raised by voluntary contributions. Euseb. Hist. l. 4, c. 23. But they excluded from this benefit those who were able to work, because

they could even assist others. Const. Apost. l. 2, c. 4. The civil laws ordered any such person, if a free man, to till the land for the public, which if he did not do, any one might make him his slave that pleased. L. 7. Cod. de Mendicantibus validis, l. 11.

10. The conditions which must necessarily accompany our alms are, that they be given readily and cheerfully, with prudence and care, according to the order of charity; with justice, without ostentation; for God, and out of a motive of tender compassion and charity. First, readily: "Say not to thy friend, come to-morrow, and I will give thee something, if thou canst now spare it."—Prov. iii. 28. "If I refused what the poor asked, and turned away from the widow."—Job, xxx. The heathens observed this: "You give twice, if you give readily."—P. Syrus. "If you had given the six sesterces when I asked you, Pætus, I should have given you credit for two hundred; but as you have thought proper to make me wait for them, shall I tell you the real truth? Pætus, you are a loser of six sesterces."*—Martial, l. 6, Epigr. 30. Benevolence is always ready, and produces her gifts soon. "He must be unwilling to give who parts with his money tardily."—Seneca de Beneficiis, p. 5.

From the example of Abraham, when he entertained three angels, thinking them strangers, "learn how ready you ought to be to entertain your guests."—St. Ambrose, l. de Abrah. c. 5. The old man runs; he flies. He has met with the game he sought. He did not call for his servant, as if he should say: I have found a treasure, and I must secure so great an advantage. "Consider Abraham's liberality; he killed a calf, he made his cake. Consider his cheerfulness; he did all this himself with the help of his wife."—St. Chrysostom, Hom. 41. in Gen. The cheerful manner of giving enhances doubly the gift; whereas, if it be joined with reproaches or contempt, this is often a greater affliction than the alms is a comfort. "He that despises the poor reproaches God."—Prov. xv. 5. "Whenever you give anything, do it with a cheerful countenance."—Eccl. xxxv. "Each one as he has settled it in his own mind; not from sadness or necessity; for God loves the cheerful giver."—1 Cor. xvi. "If you give a piece of bread without cheerfulness, you lose the bread and the merit of

* Sex sestertia, si statim dedisses,
Deberem tibi, Pæte, pro ducentis:
At nunc cum dederis diu moratus,
Vis dicam tibi veriora veris?
Sex sestertia, Pæte, perdidisti.

the alms."—St. Aug. in Ps. 42. By this disposition of the heart, the widow, with her two mites, "gave more than them all."—Mark, xii. 43.

11. Prudence must accompany every virtue, or it degenerates into vice. But this is nowhere more necessary than in alms-deeds. Great discretion is requisite that the order of charity and the greater indigence be attended to. "Let them be particularly careful not to refuse everything to such as have a right to something; not to give much where little is due, nor to part with little to those who stand in need of much; not to lavish in a hurry, not to distress by delay, not to expect a temporary reward for their charity. Let not a surly countenance spoil the present. Let them not, after they have complied with all these conditions, value themselves on what they have done."—St. Greg. M. Pastor. cur. par. 3, c. 20, p. 54, ed. Ben. Lazy beggars, who refuse to work, are usually unworthy to be much succoured, and both the civil and canon law forbid it. "He that will not work deserves not to eat."—2 Thess. iii. 10. A person is bound by the order of charity, first, to assist poor relations; secondly, those who are virtuous; those who are linked with him more strictly with Christ, and whose necessities are greatest; lastly, all in need, but chiefly his own family in faith; 1 Gal. vi. 10; even enemies. "Do good to those who hate you."—Matt. v. "If your enemy is hungry, feed him."—Rom. xii. 20. Even the wicked, for we consider them still as men: St. Aug. in Ps. 102, St. Ambrose, l. 1. Offic. c. 29. "Turn not aside from that poor person."—Tob. iv. 7. "Give to all that apply to you."—Luke, vi. 30. Though discretion is requisite, lest impostors rob the more necessitous, yet the Fathers frequently admonish us that the poor are not to be too severely suspected or examined; because such a disposition would certainly exclude many who ought to be relieved. So St. Ambrose, Offic. l. 2, c. 16; St. Augustin, Serm. 41. "You are sure to censure the beggar. Why does not this fellow work? Is he to be maintained in idleness? He is a cheat and an impostor. But does he deserve so harsh a sentence because he asks you for a bit of bread or an old coat? Yes, he will go and sell it. And pray, how do you manage your own affairs? Condemn rather yourself. Can you possibly believe that all the beggars you meet are lazy vagrants? Be less severe in your judgments, and remember the obligation of mercy and compassion."—St. Chrys. Hom. 11. in Heb. "Do not be too strict in your inquiries; receive Christ for Christ's sake. If you are too nice in your

inquiries, you will pass by many real objects. If this be not one, it is not your fault, and you will not lose the reward. But he who scrutinizes too scrupulously shall be punished. Should he be a murderer or a thief? Thy God makes the sun rise upon him whom thou judgest to be unworthy of his daily food. He is a disciple of him who healed the person that insulted him, who embraced Judas that betrayed him."—St. Chrysost. Hom. 21. in Rom. t. 19, p. 677, ed. Ben.

12. Alms must, in the first place, be always accompanied with justice. "He who defrauds the poor to offer sacrifice is no better than he who slaughters the son before his father."—Eccl. xxxiv. 24. "Hating rapine in a holocaust."—Isa. lxi. 8. "The offerings of the wicked are abominable, because they are earnings of guilt."—Prov. xxi. 27; Mal. ii. 13.

All ostentation is to be carefully shunned, and secrecy sought. "Send not the trumpeter before you." "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand does."—Matt. vi.

Our alms must be liberal and plentiful. "He that soweth sparingly shall reap sparingly; and he that soweth in blessings shall reap blessings."—2 Cor. ix. "Spare something, allow something out of your yearly income or your daily gains. Will a tenth part suit you? Well, give a tenth part. It is little, to be sure. The Pharisee, whom you are bound to surpass in virtue, gave a tenth. But I fear you do not give a thousandth part. Instead of surpassing the Pharisee, you do not equal him."—St. Aug. in Ps. 146. "The widow that gave but two farthings sowed as much as Zachæus; she gave less, it is true, but her will supplied the rest."—Id. in Ps. 125, 3. But you say you have nothing superfluous. Let Christian moderation be your rule, and you will find that in your table, servants, stables, house, dress, children, &c., three-tenths are saved. Give to the poor more freely, their wants being greater.

Remember the necessities of your family at home, so as not to forget your family abroad, committed to you by God himself. If you have a sick or poor wife within doors, serve her, employ your charity there. If you can spare but a little for other poor, endeavour to do that with a great desire. "As to your children: "If you really love your children, if you bestow upon them all the offices of charity, you ought to be particularly careful to recommend them to God by the practice of virtue. Be such a father to your children as Tobias was to his."—St. Cypr. l. de Op. et Eleem. "You are afraid that large donations should reduce

your income, and while you indulge your fears, life passes away. You are solicitous not to impair your fortune, and in the meantime your health and life are impaired; to improve your estate, you lose your soul."—Ibid. "Make yourselves friends with the fruits of iniquity."—Luke, xvi. 9. "Eat your bread with the hungry and the poor, and clothe the naked with your raiment."—Tob. iv. 17. "I was an eye to the blind, a foot to the lame. I was the father of the poor."—Job, xxix. 15, 16. "I wept over my afflicted neighbour."—Job, xxx. 25. "I refused not to assist the poor; I attended to the petition of the widow; I allowed the orphan who grew up with me a share of my food, because from my childhood and from my mother's womb I was mindful of mercy."—Job, xxxi. 16, 17, 18. How does St. Paul press upon Christians the duty of alms, being urged and straitened himself by the love of Jesus Christ? 2 Cor. viii. 2. As nothing is more hateful to men than sordid avarice, so nothing gains their affections and good will so much as charity and a prudent liberality, especially in persons of rank. Munificence is the proper attribute of princes. The joy of a good conscience, and of a generous relieving of the indigent, is a present advantage. "He is a valuable man who compassionates and assists."—Ps. iii. 5. "He scattereth and gave to the poor."—v. 9. God usually makes alms the seed of the temporal increase of our fortunes. He exacts this tribute, and he recompenses it with giving his benediction to multiply our stock and family. If he sends us trials, we must not lose our confidence in him, but trust in his mercy and rejoice in his will. See examples in the lives of Job, Tobias, St. John the Alms-giver, &c. "Honour the Lord with thy substance, and give him of the first of all thy fruits, and thy barns shall be filled with abundance, and thy wine-presses shall run over."—Prov. iii. 9, 10.

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## DISCOURSE XXII.

### ON SCANDAL.

1. The sin of scandal is defined by St. Thomas, as a word or action, bearing, at least, an appearance of evil, which gives to another an occasion of spiritual prejudice or ruin. It is a

grievous crime against that charity, which we owe both to God and to our neighbour; often against justice, and many other precepts and virtues.

A zeal for the honour of God is the first property of divine love; for every one that loves God desires, in the first place, and above all things, that he be honoured and glorified by all his creatures. This is the earnest desire of his heart; this is the first object of his prayers and endeavours. This we express in the first petition of our Lord's Prayer: "Hallowed be thy Name." This made the royal prophet, and all the saints exhort all men to praise God with him: "Magnify the Lord with me." This holy zeal moved the faithful servants of God to run over sea and land, to fear no dangers, to regard no torments or death; to look upon fatigues and labours as the greatest pleasure, that they might make God known and loved by such creatures as are capable of paying him that tribute. A soldier is zealous to defend and augment the honour of his prince, and a child that of his father; and can a Christian be indifferent to the honour of God, and yet pretend that he loves him?

One who labours to convert souls to God is called "a man of God." Is it possible that any creature, much more a Christian, can be wanting in this duty, to which so many motives most powerfully excite him? Nay, we may cry out, is it possible that any Christian should act the part of the devil, espouse his cause, and execute his designs against God? Yes; this is what every scandalous sinner doth. He makes himself the apostle of the devil—the minister and agent of the devil—"the man, or agent of the devil."

2. Christ, the Son of God, was made man, laboured, suffered, and died only to save souls, and to destroy sin. "Christ has appeared that he might take away our sins."—1 John, iii. 5. "The Son of man came to seek and to save what had perished."—Luke, xix. 10. "For us men and for our salvation." But he, who is guilty of scandal, studies to ruin and destroy the fruit and the whole mystery of the incarnation, and of man's redemption. He joins the devil in endeavouring to ruin souls, for which Christ died; and in propagating sin, which he came to take away. The devil bends all his malice to this; he uses all his art to frustrate the effects of the adorable blood of Christ. Jesus Christ was incarnate, and travelled about to convert souls; so would the devil desire to become incarnate, and to go from

province to province to draw men into his party, and to make himself known and adored. But what he cannot do himself, this he does by the scandalous sinner, and much more effectually. For men would be upon their guard against his open attempts, who are easily inveigled and overcome by the persuasions and example of men, by whom he tempts in a much more dangerous manner than in his own shape he is able to do. Yes! by your naked necks; your immodest glances; by your envenomed eyes is he, as it were, become incarnate to induce others to sin. By your slanderous or blasphemous tongue; by your sacrilegious mouth and rash oaths; by your detractions does he preach sin, and extend his empire on earth. You make yourself his instrument; his apostle; an antichrist. "And how many are become antichrists?"—1 John, ii. 18.

3. The same sin of scandal is the most capital injury that can be offered to our neighbour. Corporal murder is the greatest temporal injury we can do him; but the sin of scandal is the spiritual murder of his soul; a crime as much more grievous than the murder of the body, as the soul is of greater dignity and value, and as eternity surpasses time; especially if it cause not only sin, but the second death of the soul, which is eternal damnation. Every Christian ought, with all holy apostolic men, to weep, pray, and labour to draw souls out of the snare of the devil, and to prevent their fall into the pit of eternal damnation. But scandal wounds, murders, and destroys these immortal souls; souls for which Christ died. "Thy brother will be lost for whom Christ died."—1 Cor. vii.

4. This sin of scandal, moreover, generally carries along with it an injustice. As it is a crime of injustice to rob another of his estate, or to take away his life, so is it to rob a soul of spiritual life, or to plunge it into eternal damnation. From this circumstance, especially, arises the extreme difficulty of doing penance for the sin of scandal. He who has been guilty of it is bound to repair the injury as much as in his power lies, and this how much soever it may cost him. He is bound to instruct, to admonish, to employ others for the same purpose, to pray, to use all endeavours possible to draw those sinners, whom he has seduced, out of their precipice. And how shall he be able to know, whether he have acquitted himself sufficiently of this obligation, and satisfied this duty? When Marcion, or, as others say, his master Cerdo, the heresiarch, was converted, this condition was required of him, that he should bring back into the fold

of the Church all those souls which he had seduced: which condition, whilst he was endeavouring to accomplish, he died, says Tertullian. Berengarius, the heresiarch, had repented of his errors and sin; yet he died in the greatest terror on account of the souls which he had perverted, and had not been able to reclaim, saying: "This day my Lord Jesus Christ will appear to me, either to reward me, as I hope for my pains, or to condemn me, as I fear, for seducing others, whom I was not able to reclaim."

5. But, perhaps, a soul or many souls are already lost through your sin. Alas! what will you do? They call for vengeance against you, the author of their damnation: "Avenge our blood, O God!" Their blood calls out louder against you than that of Abel did against Cain; and this not from the earth, but now from the very bottom of hell. How will you retrieve or repair this loss? Had you stolen your neighbour's horse, or killed his ox, you might be able to restore him another. Had you burned his house, you might have built him a new one, or at least have made him some kind of amends. But what will you give him, or what will you do for the loss of his immortal soul? What amends there will you make him?

The blood of Christ also demands vengeance upon you: it was spilt for that unhappy soul, but through you was spilt in vain. "Shall thy brother perish for whom Christ died? Who will restore his innocent blood? Who will restore to him the price of our redemption?"—St. Bern. You may pray, you may weep, you may fast, and give large alms. But all your tears, all your prayers, alms-deeds, or penance will never avail that unhappy soul, which you have pushed headlong into that abyss of never-ending torments, in which there is no more room for mercy. Should you do penance yourself for your own sin, still the soul of your brother is irretrievably lost.

6. Are you then surprised, that God should so severely chastise this sin? When God pardoned David his sin, he would not let the scandal of his bad example go without some remarkable punishment, at least in this life. "However, because thou hast caused the enemies of the land to blaspheme, thy son shall die."—2 Reg. xii. 14. Nor would God desist from that chastisement, though David fasted, prayed, and wept most bitterly to avert it.—v. 16. When Ophni and Phineas, by their scandals, withdrew the people from offering sacrifices, the Scriptures say: "Their sin was very great, because they hindered men from sacrificing to the Lord."—1 Reg. ii. 17. For, as the Holy Ghost

adds: "If man offend man, God may be appeased; but if he offend the Lord, who will pray for him?"—v. 25. Wherefore God denounces against them this terrible threat: "Behold, I will do in Israel what shall make the ears of all who hear it to tingle."—1 Reg. iii. 11. A threat which he executed with the most inflexible rigour upon them and their whole family. But Christ has chiefly expressed his indignation against the authors of so grievous an evil. He, with infinite love, took upon him the office of our Saviour and Redeemer, and to deliver our souls from sin and hell, paid our ransom with the price of his own precious blood; yet, after all he had done and suffered for his little ones, he foresaw the most dreadful havoc which scandal would make among them, how many precious souls it would destroy, and thereby frustrate all the designs of his infinite mercy in their favour, and all the effects of his sufferings for them; he loved them with an infinite love; they were most dear and precious to him; yet he foresaw that they would be torn from him, and would perish eternally through this monstrous evil. Therefore he cried out: "Wo be to the world from scandal!" It is indeed necessary, considering the malice of wicked men, that scandals should come; "it is necessary that scandals should happen;" but wo to him, who by his impiety will be the author of scandal! "But wo be to that man who gives scandal!"—Matt. xviii. 7. "He who shall scandalize one of these little ones who believe in me, had better have a mill-stone hung about his neck," &c.—v. 6. The name of Jeroboam, almost whenever it occurs, is branded with this mark of his sin: "Who sinned and caused Israel to sin."—3 et 4 Reg.

7. Truly wo to this sin of scandal! It is a monster among sins; it is a murder of immortal souls; a sin of devils, like them laying snares to destroy immortal souls. "The devil was a murderer from the beginning."—John, viii. It is a sin against that charity which we owe to God, and the love we are bound to have for our neighbour; a sin against the redemption of Christ, being directly contrary to the end of his incarnation and passion; a sin against the Holy Ghost, who hath done so much, wrought so many miracles, performed so many wonderful mysteries, conferred so many graces to sanctify these very souls; a sin, of which the most rigorous account must be given at the bar of divine justice, where it will be treated with the utmost severity. That soul is indeed lost; but "I will demand his blood at thy hands."—Ezech. iii. Had you murdered the son of your friend and king, how would you

dare to appear again in his presence? And how will you stand before the sovereign Judge at the last day, stained all over with the blood of his dear little ones? Ah! his adorable injured blood will loudly demand vengeance against you. The souls which are lost by it will, amidst their flames in everlasting death, never cease to cry out for justice upon their murderer, and the cause of their perdition. The good angels who were deputed their guardians, as Christ assures us, will resent and revenge the injuries done to their pupils or wards. "I say unto you, that their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven."—Matt. xviii. The angels are our protectors; but moved to just indignation at seeing the souls, which to them were most dear, and were committed by God to their trust, fall into sin, and perish through our scandals, they become our most zealous accusers, and desire to see the loss of their dear ones, of which we have robbed God, avenged and punished as such a crime deserves. One would imagine, that a sin so enormous, so fatal, and so dreadful in its effects, both in him who commits it, and in others who are destroyed by it, would find no place at least among Christians. Yet it is a sin at the same time the most common; it is committed daily and in all places. It is a crime, into which men easily fall, when they think not of it; though not excusable, because they ought to see it. Nay, who can say that he is free from the danger of having often offended by it? We easily, by tepidity, example, omissions, light words or actions, give to others an occasion of their spiritual ruin. "Who knows his transgressions?"—Ps. xviii. Who does not tremble for himself? "Cleanse me from my hidden sins, and pardon thy servant the sins of others."—Ib.

8. The sin of scandal destroys more souls than all the endeavours of apostolic labourers, and all the means of salvation instituted by God to reclaim; nay, more than are saved by the adorable blood of Christ. The universal inundation of sin, under which almost the whole world lies desolate, is chiefly owing to the ravages of scandal. If all men led virtuous lives, this universal example of good would have so strong an influence over the minds of all persons, that the reign of virtue would be propagated to our latest posterity, and its maxims would take deep root in the tender hearts of youth. But the baneful example of tepidity and sin lays the whole world waste; and it is on no other account that the world is declared the enemy of Christ, and that the practice of virtue is a perpetual warning against its maxims, spirit, and the torrent of its vices. And happy should we be, if we were faith-

ful to our obligations to God, and did not ourselves take part sometimes with the devil or the world, in their war against Christ, by involving ourselves in the guilt of scandal. To be able to examine our own conduct on this head, it is necessary to take a view of this vice, and consider in what it consists, and in how many ways it is committed.

9. It is called scandal, which word in Greek signifies a stumbling-block or stone laid in the way, against which we strike our feet and fall. It is often taken in this literal sense in the holy Scriptures. But in the spiritual sense it means a stumbling-block or occasion of a fall to the soul; or it is a word or action bearing an appearance, at least, of evil, which presents an occasion of another's spiritual ruin. It is called a word or action, because a mere thought or desire, which is not exteriorly manifested, cannot be a scandal; but an omission of a duty is sufficient, and is here to be understood under the word action. Thus, to omit hearing mass on a Sunday may give scandal no less than a positive criminal action. There is added: "Bearing at least an appearance of evil;" for it is not necessary to scandal that the action should be of its own nature criminal; if it bear an appearance of evil, this may often suffice, as in the case of Eleazar, in the book of Maccabees, had he eaten clean meats, which the people had thought to have been swine's flesh, forbidden by the law. The definition says, "giving an occasion," to express that the action committed must have a tendency towards such an evil influence; for if an occasion of scandal be taken where none is given, it is "scandal taken, not given;"* and the sin of scandal is not committed by such an action. It is said, "an occasion;" because it is not the cause of another's sin; he who sins is the cause of his own fall, but the scandal gave the occasion to it, and this occasion is equally given, and the sin of scandal is truly committed, though the ruin of another do not really follow. By the last words, "of a spiritual ruin," we are to understand not only the fall of another's soul into sin, but an omission of any virtue; for he is guilty of a mortal sin of scandal who withdraws another from the act of any virtue.

10. We often call the offence that is taken, or the sin which is committed by another person, a "passive scandal;" as when we say, such a one was scandalized at another. This is sometimes taken with just cause, as when scandal had been really given.

* Scandalum acceptum, non datum.

Or it is taken without just cause, out of weakness, which is called the scandal of the weak, as when the Jewish converts took scandal at those who eat unclean meats; or it is taken out of mere malice, and this is called a "Pharisaical scandal," because the Pharisees behaved so towards Christ. For Christ himself was to the wicked "a stumbling stone, and a stone of scandal."—Isa. viii. This scandal is to be despised; nor must we omit the practice of virtue on account of the murmur, envy, or anger of the wicked. So Christ said of the Pharisees: "Suffer ye them."—Matt. xv. Passive scandal, except that of malice, is not a distinct sin from that which is committed, nor is passive scandal properly called scandal, but rather the effect of scandal.

11. It is only active scandal to which this definition belongs, and of which we speak when we mention the sin of scandal. Now, this scandal is either direct, viz., when a person endeavours to persuade another to sin; or indirect and interpretative, when a person does not positively and directly solicit another to sin, nor intends it, yet does what tends to be an occasion of another's sin. Such a person, besides his own actual sin, contracts by the same action the malice of a distinct sin against charity, viz., of the sin of scandal, as St. Thomas proves, 2, 2æ, q. 43, a. 3; and as appears from Christ, Matt. xviii.: "He that shall scandalize," &c.; and from St. Paul, 1 Cor. viii.: "Thy brother shall perish in thy knowledge;" who both speak evidently of indirect scandal. And the malice of an action is always imputed to sin, and sufficiently voluntary, although it operate indirectly.

Hence, it follows that whoever first solicited another to sin, or suggested the thought of any sin to his accomplices, or who persuaded or encouraged them, is bound to confess this sin of scandal, with all its aggravating circumstances, as if he had seduced, suborned, or compelled them; also, how many persons he thus solicited, and what farther damages or evils naturally flowed from the sins of those others to which he had given occasion. This is also to be done generally as to public sins committed before others. Thus, a person must confess, as nearly as he can guess, before how many persons he has detracted, sworn, spoken lewdly, or committed any other sin; often, also, the quality of those persons, as if they were his own children, pupils, apprentices, or the like, whom he is bound in a particular manner to instruct, edify, &c.

Hence, also, we must infer that it is not lawful to sell bad books, except that they may be confuted, or to sell any other

thing to those who openly design to make a bad use of it; to give drink to others visibly to a great excess, as is often done at tables, or in taverns, &c. Where, indeed, the necessity is most cogent, and the concurrence is not such but that the evil would otherwise equally be committed, many divines excuse it from guilt; as in the case of Christian slaves who row the gallies of Mahometan pirates by grievous compulsion, and to avoid torments and death, which, nevertheless, could not be allowed, if, on their refusing that work, the infidels could not fight, or would not be superior to the Christians.

12. The most general and frequent manner of committing the sin of scandal is that of evil example. The whole world is almost generally formed and modelled by example. All men, but especially youth, learn and imitate insensibly what they see. Indeed, such is the frame of man, that the soul receives impressions easily through the senses, and is, as it were, moulded by them. Through the corruption of our nature this effect is most powerful and strong from objects which flatter the passions and concupiscence. Hence arises the great influence of bad example. Every one, therefore, who sins by word or action before others is ordinarily guilty of scandal. I say ordinarily; for if a person should blaspheme before very holy persons, there could be no danger of scandal, as his action could excite in them only horror and indignation. But ordinarily all sin, whether passion, swearing, &c., when committed before others, is attended with the malice of scandal. Example teaches and preaches vice, and breaks down all the fences which are set to guard virtue. The great natural ramparts of innocence are the ignorance and shame of sin. Now, both these are broken down by evil example. How happy are those tender souls that have never known any more of malice than its name, and that only to abhor and flee it? How amiable, how secure, how perfect is such an innocence? How beautiful is the short eulogium of St. Editha, in the Roman martyrology, couched in this single line: "Who, being consecrated to God from her tender years, was rather unacquainted with the world than left it." How many young persons lived in holy innocence till they learned evil by reading comedies or romances, or by hearing lewd or impious discourses, or by seeing bad example? For sin is learned by being seen. But the scandalous sinner is not content with making vice known, he moreover labours to make it general, and to perpetuate it to all succeeding ages, by rendering it familiar, and breaking down the shame and horror which men

have of vice, till at length it appears honourable, and a subject of boasting and of glory. "We easily accustom ourselves to what we often hear. Even murder itself appears a crime only when committed singly."—St. Cyp. l. de Spectac. Ep. 22. "In the company of the wicked the innocent man is the only offender. It is reckoned a crime not to imitate their example. Fashion sanctions their transgressions, and their number silences the law." —Ibid. Through the dissolute lives of Christians are the maxims of the Gospel forgotten and trampled upon, and our holy religion blasphemed. "Christ is insulted in us."—Salvian.

13. To such a height are impiety, irreligion, and barefaced atheism now-a-days carried among us, that it is made a fashionable point of wit to turn into ridicule the most sacred mysteries of faith. And these low sarcasms, though grounded in excessive ignorance and impiety, affect the minds of weak men. So enormous and shocking is this scandal, that it is impossible to find a name to express it. "What they do not know they blaspheme."—2 Pet. ii. 12. Of all scandals next to this here mentioned against faith, that is the worst which laughs at virtue. Wicked men make the virtuous the objects of their satire, only because their example is a censure of their own impiety. "The righteous man is despised by him who walks in the path of iniquity."—Prov. xxiv. 2. We are less astonished at the heathens, who insulted Christ, whom they did not know; but here is a Christian, who derides those that walk in the narrow paths of Christ. He who bears this holy name laughs at the wisdom of him whom he pretends to follow. What makes the condition of the authors of this kind of scandal worse is, that they often excuse it to themselves; because, if they dissuade others from the evangelical counsels, or from heroic or eminent practices of virtue, they say that such omissions are not in their own nature sins. But are they not at least a great spiritual prejudice? Would it be no injustice to rob a man, upon pretence that this loss will not starve him to death? The two sons of Heli, when they withdrew men from voluntary sacrifices, might allege the same. Yet the Holy Ghost calls their sin an exceeding great crime; and God inflicted on them a punishment which no one could hear without being struck with horror. Yet this is the sin of those who call others scrupulous, that condemn immodesty in dress, or do not go to balls and theatres; or who call those bigots that frequent assiduously sermons and public prayer, &c. Ah! shall we heed these revilers at religion? Certainly no more

than we should a fool that laughed at wisdom. The horseman, when the dogs bark at him, does not even stop to beat them back, but pursues his journey; by which means they soon cease disturbing him; so ought we to behave towards such enemies of religion.

14. If scandal be in all ranks most grievous and pernicious, it is more especially so in persons whom God has raised above the level of the world. "The deformity of vice becomes more hideous in proportion to the rank and consequence of him who offends."*—Juven. Sat. 8, v. 140. St. Fulgentius, writing to a Roman senator, put him in mind, that by his elevation in the world he must either do much good or a great deal of harm; so great is the influence of example in a high station. This reproach in the first place belongs to the priest. "And now, O ye priests! this command is addressed to you."—Mal. ii. As their lips are the depositories of sacred science, so ought their lives to be the uniform rule of perfect virtue. "But you have quitted the line of rectitude, and have scandalised many of my people. I will, therefore, render you low and contemptible in the opinion of mankind."—Ibid. Parents and masters of families come in for their share next, as to the care they ought to have of those under them. It is an obligation of every Christian, "to make himself agreeable to his neighbour by virtue and edification."—Rom. xv. "Simple and inoffensive."—Phil. i. "Let your light shine," &c. —Matt. v.

The obligation of restitution, and of repairing the damage ensuing from scandal, renders this sin the more dangerous. "Let them tremble and be cautious how they imitate the malice of the devil, by seducing others to their utter ruin, especially the young and thoughtless. I do not see how they can sufficiently repent. They should have thought it quite enough to damn their own souls."—Gerson, Serm. de Pœnit. The same learned and pious author observes, Compend. Theol. c. 18, t. 1, p. 441, that those who have been the occasion of another's sin seldom or never do secure penance, "because they cannot correct those whom they have seduced. Perhaps, these are now suffering in hell-flames, calling down the vengeance of heaven, and praying for their eternal damnation." He, therefore, most vehemently exhorts to avoid all danger of scandal.

* Omne animi vitium tanto conspectius in se
Crimen habet, quanto major, qui peccat, habetur.

Let us, then, say with the apostle: "If by eating I scandalise my brother, I will abstain from food for ever." He would abstain from innocent things and his own right; how much more must we shun those that are evil? "Let us cultivate peace, and give edification to one another."—Rom. xiv. 19. Anciently, how did the holy lives of the professors of our divine religion exalt its honour and dignity? But, now by so many hypocrites, libertines, tepid and dissolute livers, even in its very bosom, is scandal spread. "Is this the flourishing city?"—Jerm. Lament. cap. ii. That Church so flourishing, so admirable, so holy? "Your children are ruined—the enemy has seized everything, and the city is reduced to the last extremity—she is beheld with contempt, and her holy festivals are treated with mockery. But be comforted, be comforted."—Isa. iv. Holy Mother, comfort yourself in your affliction. God will always preserve you many holy members separated from the crowds and multitudes of the wicked. But let every one take care to shun the contagion of the scandalous. "I have hated the congregation of the profane, and I will not tarry with the wicked."—Ps. xxv.

## DISCOURSE XXXIII.

### ON BAD COMPANY.

1. To shun the dreadful danger and destroying influence of scandal, it is a precept of the utmost necessity, obligation, and importance, that we avoid bad company. Who can see, without floods of tears, what heart can consider, without bursting with grief, the horrible spiritual evils and desolation with which the example of the wicked fills the earth? the extinction of virtue, and the universal inundation of sin which it causes! or the eternal damnation of millions and millions of precious souls, created to enjoy God for ever, and redeemed by the blood of Christ, which it never ceases to occasion! or the disorders, which in every part of the earth, in every nation, in every city, almost in every private house, it daily is the cause of! The providence of God, everywhere just, everywhere most holy and full of mercy and goodness, suffers the wicked to live for great and good purposes. He who permits the devil to assail men for the trial of their virtue, suffers the example of sinners in the world.

First, that the sinners themselves may have time to repent, and to show that he desires not their death, but their conversion and salvation. Secondly, that the just may have in them an exercise of their patience, a test of their virtue, and an occasion of multiplying their triumphs and crowns. If there were no tyrants on earth, God would never have been glorified by the triumphs of his martyrs: and, if no men were impious or unjust, where would be the merit or any proof of our meekness, patience, humility, and many other virtues? God, therefore, permits the bad everywhere to live intermixed with the good. In the bosom of his Church, in the most sacred sanctuaries of virtue, he suffers the enemy to come in the night, while his pastors sleep, and sow tares amidst the good corn; both which must grow up together till the day come, in which both are to be cut down, when the corn will be gathered into the barn, and the tares thrown into the fire to burn. Whence, he likens his Church on earth to a barn floor, on which the wheat lies mingled with the chaff, nay, buried and almost hidden under the great heaps of chaff, till the day of winnowing shall come. This situation of the world lays all men under the strictest obligation of studying what their comportment ought to be with regard to the wicked. To explain which we will consider, first, what our obligation is of shunning the company or familiarity of the wicked; and, secondly, what our behaviour ought to be in the necessary commerce which we are obliged to have in this life with the wicked.

2. All men are strictly bound, as they tender their duty to God, and their eternal salvation, to shun the company of the wicked. First, because it is infinitely pernicious to their own souls, and an immediate occasion of their sin and damnation. Secondly, because it is scandalous to our neighbours. Thirdly, because it is highly injurious to God, and an express violation of his most holy and inviolable laws. There is no more powerful help or stronger incentive to virtue than the example of the virtuous. The way to virtue, through precepts, is long and difficult; that which conducts us by example is short, easy, and secure. It teaches us without being perceived to teach, and without assuming the air of a master; hence pride, which recoils at precepts, makes no opposition to the insinuations of example, and the other passions are silenced. Example, moreover, shows the practice of virtue possible and easy, points out to us the path in which we are to walk, and leads us as it were by the hand into it. Discourses only represent virtue in the abstract, but example renders it sen-

sible, and clothes it as it were with a body; and its impressions are deeper and are made with pleasure, because they are insinuated through all the senses. Hence, the force of example is incredible, and almost irresistible, as even the heathen philosophers and poets have observed. Seneca lays down this as the first rule, if we desire to shun vice and practise virtue. "If you would avoid vice, retire far from the examples of the wicked. Seek good company; live with Cato and with Lælius."—Senec. Ep. 104. "Nothing more effectually promotes the interest of virtue or stops the progress of vice than the company of good men. Their behaviour, their conversation, will insensibly sink into the soul, and their appearance, and even their silence may be useful to us."—Id. Ep. 94. This maxim of philosophers is the voice of nature and the dictate of reason. The most sacred oracles of the Holy Ghost repeat to us the same lesson. "He that herds with the wise will himself be wise."—Prov. xiii. "Keep company with the elderly and the wise," &c.—Eccl. vi.

So powerful is the force of good example, that it was a saying of St. Mathias the apostle, "that the faithful sins, if his neighbour sins," as St. Clemens of Alexandria mentions, Strom. l. 1, p. 748, *i. e.*, so edifying ought the life of a Christian to be, that his example should suffice to restrain the wicked, and teach them virtue. And St. Justin observed to the heathens, that many heathens, by living among Christians, and seeing the example of their virtue, had been worked into a change of their manners; from being violent, tyrannical, and passionate, were become meek and affable, and by seeing the patience, firmness, and contempt of the world, which Christians showed, had learned themselves some degree of the same virtues.—Apol. 2. (nunc 1.), p. 127. St. Jerome, speaking of a virtuous family, says that Jove himself, by such company and example, would have become a Christian.

3. If virtuous example has such force and such charms to invite others to an imitation, we must necessarily conclude that the conversation of scandalous sinners is much more powerful in communicating its poison; whereas vice finds greater dispositions in our corrupt nature, and suits more with our depraved inclinations and passions. On this account, where necessity and justice permit it, we are bound to shun the scandalous company of sinners. This is the strict and indispensable precept of God. "We warn you to shun every man that goes astray."—1 Thess. iii. When the Hebrews entered the land of Canaan, God forbade them all alliance with the heathen nations. "Take care never to contract a friend-

ship with the inhabitants of this country" (Exod. xxxiv.), "for they will certainly induce you to adopt their gods."—Ibid. Solomon, though the wisest of men, and before his sin a saint and prophet, by neglecting this rule forfeited the grace of God, and lapsed into the impiety and extravagance of idolatry. This law was inculcated figuratively by the distinction of clean and unclean creatures, as Origen observes, Hom. 7. in Levit. The unclean owls represent sinners, from whose converse we are bound to contain ourselves. It was likewise signified by another law, by which lepers were declared by God unclean, and it was forbidden to touch or have any communication with them. If this precaution were necessary to prevent the danger of infection from a contagious bodily distemper, how much more necessary is the same law for the health of the soul? For "evil communication corrupts good manners."—1 Cor. xv. "The discourse of the wicked creeps like a crab."—2 Tim. ii. Hence St. Paul repeats this precept on several occasions, as when he says: "If the man whom you call brother be a fornicator, or a detractor, or a thief, you must not even eat with him."—1 Cor. v.

4. To enter into a league of strict amity with the wicked is to affront and contemn God. Are not all notorious and public sinners the declared enemies of God? What would you think of a son who should league himself in heart and affection with the persecutors or murderers of his father? Would not you justly abhor him as a monster in nature? But is not this what you do by choosing the wicked for your confidants? As long as they continue notoriously to boast in iniquity, there is between them and God an irreconcileable hatred. And you in some measure lean to them by your friendship with them, and involve yourself in the punishment which they deserve; at least in the temporal judgments which their impiety often draws upon their heads. When Josaphat, a religious prince, was allied with Achab, a wicked apostate, for reasons of state, he was severely condemned by God, by whose command the prophet Jehu declared to him, 2 Kings, xix.: "You assist the wicked, and associate with those who hate God, on which account you deserve to be rebuked."

5. By this we also give just scandal to our neighbours. They know how severely God forbids such company; they know the danger and the consequences of it; therefore we incur their censure, and the disgrace and infamy annexed to the character of sinners; and by our example we invite others to do the same. They who see us always with the swearers, the debauched, the

public sinners, will think us like them with whom we herd; nor can we call their censure rash, or unreasonable and unjust. One who has an abhorrence of sin could never take delight in seeing or hearing sin. A true servant of God ought to be pierced with grief to hear his name affronted and blasphemed; to see him offended. How can a man be touched with zeal for his divine honour, or charity for the soul of his neighbour, who can hear with indifference such language? Pious persons never hear a rash oath or impious word without an inward feeling of grief and horror; and it is the custom of many on every such occasion to say in their heart some short prayer, to make some act of divine praise, desiring to repair the injury done to their God, or some short ejaculation for the unhappy soul of him that has sinned in their presence. How could a dutiful subject be delighted in company which always talks treason? or how could a son bear the society of, or love as a friend, one who never ceases to abuse, revile, and slander his good parent? Even how could any one love another, and keep company with those who continually abused and calumniated him? No; men will naturally judge that he who loves the company of public sinners is not himself averse from sin. The lovers of learning love the society of learned men; those who are devoured by a worldly spirit seek the conversation of persons who are filled with the same, and whose language and carriage breathe that air; and so of others: but the virtuous seek the company of those whose prudence, temperance, charity, religion, &c., give them a true esteem of their persons, and whose example may be to them an incitement to virtue. It is a proverb in all languages: "Birds of a feather flock together;" and again with the philosopher: "Show me what company he keeps, and I will tell you what he is." It is a rule which reason, experience, and authority equally teach. By this will men judge that, if we love and frequent bad company, we are ourselves no enemies to sin, or at least shall not long continue so. If we converse with drunkards, swearers, profane or lewd persons, we either love their vices, or at least shall not be long free from them.

6. Bad company is not only in itself injurious to God and scandalous to our neighbours, but it is most pernicious to ourselves. We are bound to shun all immediate occasions of sin. To court the danger or the temptation is to be our own tempters; it is to abandon God, and the means to which he has annexed his succours and protection. It is a presumption highly injurious and provoking to his divine Majesty, who always withdraws his graces

from those who by it fly in his very face, and walk forth to meet and invite his enemy. Now among all the immediate occasions of sin none are so fatal, so enormous, or so expressly forbidden by the law of God as evil company. Hence the prophets and saints, though confirmed in virtue by long habit, and fenced by fervour and the strongest graces, always were most careful to shun the company of the wicked, which if they had not done, they were sensible that God would have immediately withdrawn his graces and forsaken them: for no weakness against sin is so great as a presumptuous confidence in one's self. All our strength is from God; and he denies his succour to those who are self-sufficient, and who tempt him. If the saints were obliged to fear and avoid this danger—if the greatest prophets had not strength to encounter it—can we wilfully throw ourselves into it? We might more easily raise a dead man to life than escape ruin, if we fling ourselves headlong down the precipice.

7. Can any one touch pitch without being defiled by it? as the Wise Man asks us; so neither can a person frequent bad company without losing his innocence. Who would choose for his diversion or amusement to live in a pest-house, continually to converse with persons infected with the plague, and always to breathe a deadly contagious air? Yet, that is not so dangerous to the body as wicked company is to the soul. And this is a truth so evident, and in which all men agree so universally, that to offer to prove it before men who have the least tincture of religion, or even of reflection or experience, would be as if one should set himself to prove that the sun shines, whilst its rays beat on our eyes. Whence, Tertullian exclaims: "Who does not know that faith is lost by bad company? Who can doubt but faith is by little and little effaced by conversing with an infidel spirit? Who can doubt but a religious soul will be quite changed by the example of an irregular friend? Who can doubt but the most humble will thereby become proud, the most chaste lewd, and the most devout quite worldly and dissipated? Who is there that does not know this?" Wherefore the Wise Man begins his advice on virtue with this lesson: "My son, if sinners shall flatter thee with their caresses, consent not to them."—Prov. i. 10. "Walk not thou with them, refrain thy foot from their paths."—v. 15. But you say you are resolved not to be moved by his bad example or discourse. I believe, indeed, this to be your purpose; but I am assured that your resolution is vain. You are not sensible of the force of such example; nor will you perceive its effects upon your own heart,

till it will be quite perverted and changed, and you will no longer be the same man. You have his impious example before your eyes; his evil discourse often beats upon your ears; you are the depository of his sentiments; by hearing him speak, by seeing him act, you become accustomed to think as he does, to talk and to act as he does. At first his lewd sallies give you some displeasure, and excite in you a horror; but by degrees this insensibly wears off; you will hear him soon without this disgust, and at last with pleasure; nay, you will yourself ere long imitate him in your actions. Who does not know that the most resolute virtue, which torments or death could never have daunted, will by this means be shaken, and at length destroyed? Familiarity has this effect even in indifferent things; nay, in those that are shocking. A heathen philosopher observes: "Such is the power of company, that we unknowingly imitate the manners of those with whom we live, as Plato's disciples imitated his broad shoulders, Aristotle's friends his bald pate, and Alexander's followers his crooked neck and his rough voice."—Plutarch, l. de Discrimine Amici et Adulatoris. Who, then, can be so foolish as to persuade himself that he can converse with the vicious or worldly persons, &c., without contracting some of their spirit? No, you esteem, you love and honour your friend; and you will excuse his vices, and will at last honour them. Thus the most modest young man, by frequent interviews with a person who is dangerous to him, becomes at last lost even to shame; thus the most temperate becomes a sot, and the most virtuous a profligate debauchee; in the same manner as the Jews, by living among idolators, "contracted alliances with the Gentiles, and learned their manners."—Ps. cv. But you will say: Must I then lose and abandon my friend, renounce my diversion and amusement, and turn recluse? As to a friend, you must not only part with him, but even lose an eye or a hand, if it were a scandal to your soul. Nothing can be put in balance with your great and only interest. "It is better to go to heaven with one eye, than," &c. As to recreation, if your passion at present makes you incapable of relishing any other object than that which soothes it, this slavery and restraint require a more violent remedy; but your joy will be the greater in your cure; and then you will find more pleasure within the bounds of virtue, than the thorns of passion could ever afford.

8. This rule is general; this law regards both young and old, sinners and saints; but it more especially concerns youth. Their passions are stronger and more lively; the fire of their age

is more active; their want of experience and prudence makes them be less upon their guard; and, it is their present business to set out on moulding and forming their minds, which are open to, and susceptible of, the impressions which they receive. Thus, we see youth usually forming themselves from, and imbibing the maxims and the spirit of those with whom they converse. Therefore, the choice of good company is of the utmost importance for the pious education of youth. All attention, precepts, and instructions are rendered fruitless through the baneful influence of bad company. The innocent age is most apt to be tainted with vice; and the seeds of pride, untractableness, quarrelsomeness, and every passion, take deep root in the tender souls, which are not to be afterwards extirpated without the greatest difficulty. St. Austin, by this corrupter of virtue, lost all the first impressions he had received from the example and instructions of his holy mother, St. Monica; he ascribes to bad company his fall into the most criminal habits, and writes of himself, that by this fatal stratagem of the devil, "I went on so blindly, that I was ashamed to be outdone in wickedness, while my companions were boasting of their crimes, and assuming the honour of superior guilt. Not to incur their displeasure I advanced in profligacy, and when I found that I could not equal them by real crimes, I had recourse to invention, that I might not suffer in their opinion by innocence."—Conf. c. 2. et 3. Parents, masters of families, and all you who have received from God authority over others, with an obligation of watching over their souls, and of conducting them in the divine service, listen and consider your weighty obligation in this point. You are bound to be vigilant, and to watch assiduously, that children, apprentices, servants, &c., under your care, never fall into this pit. Remember that this point is, of all others, the most important; without which all your labour and care will be lost. A modern philosopher, who has written a famous book on education, speaks as follows on this head: "Having named company, I am almost ready to throw away my pen, and trouble you no farther on this subject; for, since that does more than all the precepts, rules, and instructions, methinks it is almost wholly in vain to make a long discourse on other things; and to talk of that almost to no purpose. For you will say, what shall I do with my son? If I keep him always at home, he will be in danger of being my young master; if I let him go abroad it is impossible to keep him from the contagion of rudeness and vice."—Locke on Education,

§ 70, p. 76. If parents send their children abroad, let it be their care to take all prudent precautions that they may be guarded against this danger, and linked with good acquaintance.

Give me leave, also, to address myself to you, tender souls, which are stepping into the world; and suffer me to recommend to you one word of advice, which may be said to comprise all precepts and lessons in one. Be infinitely circumspect and cautious in the choice of your acquaintance and play-fellows: converse with the serious and virtuous, that you may learn that spirit; but, steer your course always wide of the fatal rock of the Sirens, or you will most certainly perish. Take this rule along with you to your schools, and to all places wherever you go. Imitate St. Basil and St. Gregory Nazianzen, as the latter says (Or. in Laudem S. Basil), when they went to Athens to study: "Neither did we keep company with the rude, wicked, or impudent, but with those who were the best and the most virtuous; nor with the quarrelsome, but with the mild and the most peaceable, and those whose conversation brought us much profit; being persuaded that it is an illusion to seek the company of sinners, that we may convert them; it is far more to be feared that they will communicate their poison to us."

Some may ask, who are to be understood by bad company? I answer, all public scandalous sinners, habitual swearers, drunkards, and lewd debauchees, who use indecent liberties contrary to modesty in dress, words, and lightness of their behaviour; which last sort of bad company is so much the more pernicious, as that passion is in itself of all others the most dangerous to the heart. Under the same name of bad company we must comprise tale-bearers, detractors, and above all, those who make a jest of holy things, whose profane blasphemies and impieties sap the very foundation of religion. Hence, we may infer, with what care a Christian is bound to shun public assemblies where such scandalous persons are admitted, as is the unhappy case in England. Men fear not openly to advance impious or lewd discourses in such places, which, in any other country, shame would check; and such persons are often the loudest, and engross the chief part of the discourse.

9. This law is to be understood with certain limitations. For in some circumstances bad company cannot be entirely shunned, as in prisons, where to avoid it is physically impossible; but, all intimate connexions must even there be shunned. The same in some other cases is morally impossible, as where children under

age have scandalous parents, or a wife a scandalous husband, whom they cannot leave without a violation of the laws of justice. But where necessity, or other obligations, render this rule impossible, persons are bound to arm themselves against the danger with the utmost diligence, by assiduous prayer, watchfulness, and a holy conversation. Nor is this rule to be extended to those sinners, whose conversation is no way scandalous. Even with regard to the scandalous, we are not to carry this rule too far; we owe to these a commerce of charity and common duties, against which we should notoriously offend, should we shun them as if we treated them like excommunicated persons. We must converse with them, as Christ did with the Pharisees and publicans; as far as charity obliges. We must in this imitate the conduct of God towards sinners.

10. God is with sinners, and he is not with them. He is with them by his immensity, and by the necessity of their existence. He is with them, as the Creator is necessarily with all his creatures, by his wisdom to govern them and keep the universe in due order; by his omnipotence to move them, and by his goodness, from the effects of which he excepts not even sinners. But in other respects he withdraws himself from them. "God has departed from me," said Saul, 1 Kings, xxviii. For no sooner is a man fallen into sin than God breaks with him all that near alliance, of which his charity of grace was the link; and in this sense he is said to fly from them, to leave them. He is no longer with them by that tender affection with which he cherishes the just, nor by his special protection and providence, which he promises to his servants; nor by the communication of his singular gifts, which he confers on those that love and serve him; nor by his union in the sacraments. So must we live with the wicked. "We must live with the wicked so as to tolerate, not to imitate them."—St. Aug. "Otherwise we ought to quit this world."—1 Cor. v. The time of separation is not yet come; the good must live with the bad till the master of the family shall take away all scandals by gathering his elect to himself. In the meantime we must bear the trials to which this circumstance exposes us.

11. We must, moreover, make it the subject of our triumphs, and the occasion of our virtue. Thus does God bear the wicked so as to draw from them good, and the exaltation of his own glory. "He makes a good use of the sinner, and he would not suffer him to exist if such use could not be made of him."—St. Aug. As

that Father says, he employs the heathens to show the power of his grace in their conversion by twelve fishermen; the heretics and schismatics to demonstrate the unchangeableness of faith, and the firm foundation of his Church, which no assaults can shake; the Jews, to manifest the truth of his prophecies, to which their miserable scattered remains bear everywhere an incontestible evidence for the conviction of the incredulous; all sinners, to show his goodness and his patience in inviting them to mercy, and his justice in the punishment of those who harden their hearts to final impenitence. We must also draw our own spiritual profit from the company of the wicked. First, by seeing their falls and blindness we must be stirred up the more to humble ourselves, to tremble lest we should also fall, and to live in stricter watchfulness and fervour. St. Teresa writes, Advice 7, p. 244, t. 5, that she profited much by every one of her companions, though she had a great multitude of sisters, because, whilst she endeavoured to imitate all the good she saw any of them practise, she never intermeddled to correct the imperfections of any, but fortified herself against them. Secondly, we must bear the humiliations and persecutions we meet with through them as our trials. Many complain of the dangers of their condition from a wife, a husband, a neighbourhood, and murmur under their trials, but they know not the advantages offered them by these very means. They say it is impossible to resist so much bad example, to bear so many trials, whereas it is by them they must be saved, or, through their abuse and malice, damned. They can be saved only by the means which God has appointed for that purpose; and these very trials have been ordained by him in infinite wisdom and mercy for their sanctification. He would not have them to work out their salvation in any other place or in any other manner than this situation of which they complain. This is just that which must save them. These scandals and bad examples avoided will crown them; these trials borne with patience will enrich them with all virtues.

Thirdly, the scandals of the wicked must move us to zeal for God's honour, and to compassion for their souls; we must weep and pray for their conversion. Lastly, we must labour to gain them to Christ by seasonable advice, or at least by setting them a good example of humility, patience, and charity. "That considering your good works, they may glorify God."—1 Peter, ii. "I will teach the wicked thy ways, and the ungodly shall be converted to thee."—Ps. l. The presence of Cato at the festival of

Flora restrained the people from demanding the usual obscene ceremonies, as long as he stayed, being awed by his virtue.

12. Thus must we profit by the very company of the wicked. We owe to them all the duties and offices of sincere charity, and must show them all the external marks of respect and affection; but we must shun any familiar commerce or intimacy with them, nor make ourselves their confidants or companions. "I have not sat in the council of vanity, and I will not associate with the workers of iniquity; I have hated the congregation of the wicked."—Ps. xxv. We must avoid all particular friendship with them and depart from their meetings. "Carry not the yoke with infidels."—1 Cor. vi. "Retire from the dwellings of the wicked, lest ye be involved in their sins."

Farther, all masters of families, and those who have jurisdiction and authority over others, are bound to expel all scandalous livers out of their houses. When God had Josue put to death, and removed out of the way of the scandalous Achan, he said: "Rise, and sanctify the people."—Jos. vii. This would sanctify families. Remove the vicious servant who infects your house, and you will make it a house of piety; the quarrelsome incendiary, the detractor, or gossiping tale-bearer, and you will make it a dwelling of peace; the profane swearer, and you will avert from your house the dreadful curses and heavy judgments which his impiety daily calls down from heaven upon it; the girl of light airs, of immodest carriage, or vain in her dress and appearance, the lover of romances, play-books, and stage entertainments, and you will preserve your family, your children, and yourself from that spreading contagion. Let all who serve you be sensible that you, in the first place, require that they serve God. Thus remove scandals from your own houses. Those which fall not under our jurisdiction we must bear with patience and perseverance; we must even by them sanctify our own souls. It is the height of impiety to sin in the land of saints. Isa. xxvi. This it is that exaggerates its malice; therefore "he shall not see the glory of God." Thus, to be pious amidst evil will enhance the triumph of virtue. Job was a saint amidst idolaters, Moses in the court of Pharaoh. St. Louis on the throne shut his eyes to the dazzling pomp of human grandeur, and forgot not God in the licentiousness of arms and tumult. No one can be crowned who has not fought, nor can any fight without dangers. To all his elect will God say: "You have remained with me in the time of temptation."—Luke, xxii.

# DISCOURSE XXIV.

## ON RASH JUDGMENT.

1. The apostle pronounces the love of our neighbour to be the perfection of the Gospel, and the fulfilling of the Law. Our divine Redeemer styles it, by excellency, his precept, and the precept of the New Law. To make its bond the more sacred among his followers, he unites them into one mystical body, cemented by his precious blood, and vouchsafes to be himself their head, and to make them all his joint members, and to feed them all with the same divine food, his own adorable body and blood. Hence, to sin against charity among Christians is for them to break all these most sacred and inviolable ties, to trample under foot this his darling precept, and sacrilegiously to tear asunder his mystical members. Our tender common Father and ever adorable Redeemer has instituted mutual charity as the characteristic by which his disciples should be distinguished. But, now-a-days, alas! could an infidel know a Christian by this mark? Do not jealousies, quarrels, enmities, detractions, and the like, reign so universally as to be esteemed innocent, and even points of honour and good breeding? But, nothing shows more glaringly how this divine precept, this basis of Christian morality, is neglected and trodden under foot, than to see how much rash judgments and suspicions prevail. We are not content to expose and traduce the least failings of our fellow-members; but, we suspect and condemn their most innocent actions. Nothing can argue a more flagrant want of the spirit of charity among us; yet nothing is more common even among many who pretend to devotion. How many make no scruple at all of it, and, blinded by pride, flatter themselves that it proceeds from a holy zeal, and their aversion to evil? To disabuse them, and to endeavour to root out so pernicious a principle, and so grievous a sin, we must consider how unjust and criminal this vice is in itself, how detestable in its sources, and how many ways it may be committed.

2. The first circumstance which shows the enormity of this vice is, that all judgment is unjust, if it want authority and jurisdiction. Almighty God has erected among men an external court of judicature, in order to maintain public peace and justice, and has established in his Church the internal court of penance.

Exclusive of these cases, he has given no jurisdiction to any man to judge in any way his neighbour. On the contrary, he has most solemnly reserved to himself this sovereign prerogative; and, as he is Lord paramount over all creatures, so he styles himself Judge of the living and the dead. This is the distinguishing title of his sovereignty; and he will suffer no partner in this supreme authority. He is the Creator of all men, and their sovereign Lord and Master. They belong to him, soul and body, all whatever they are; they are entirely his. He, therefore, and he alone, has essentially from himself, and of his own right, lawful authority to judge men. Even Christ, as man, is vested with this right of judging men, only as given him by his Father: "The Father has given all judgment to his Son."—John, v. 22. "It is he, who is appointed by God, Judge of the living and of the dead."—Acts, x. 42. Therefore, if a man presume to judge his brother, he invades the divine prerogative, and usurps the right and jurisdiction of Christ. "Whoever judges before the coming of Christ is Antichrist, because he usurps the authority of Christ," says St. Anastasius the Sinaite, Hom. de Synax, p. 906. "Why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou despise thy brother? for we shall all stand before the tribunal of Christ."—Rom. xiv. 10. We are all equally to plead our cause and to receive our sentence at the same bar, and can pretend to no jurisdiction over our fellows without invading the rights of our common sovereign Judge and God. "Who art thou, that judgest another's servant? It is to his lord that he stands or falls."—Rom. xiv. 4. "He who detracts his brother, or judges his brother, detracts the law and judges the law. There is one Legislator and Judge who can destroy and save. But who art thou, who judgest thy neighbour?"—James, iv. 11, 12. He who rashly judges his neighbour tacitly condemns the law of God, which forbids him to judge; and he who is a sinful, blind creature usurps that authority which the sovereign Legislator reserves to himself.

Even Christ, when he came to redeem the world, said "he did not come to judge the world, but that the world might be saved by him."—John, iii. 17. "All power, all things in heaven and earth were given to him" (John, iii. 35); and he was constituted by his Father Lord of all things, and Judge of the living and the dead. Yet he would not condemn, because his hour was not yet come, before the day of every one's trial. This merciful quality was so conspicuous in him, that his enemies

made it the ground of their stratagems and snares to destroy him. They brought to him a woman taken in adultery, sure, from his constant principle and practice of mercy, that he would condemn no one. Whence, they designed to accuse him of acquitting a person whom the law condemned. He, by his divine wisdom, eluded their craft; yet he refused to condemn her, though guilty of so flagrant a crime. "Neither will I condemn thee."—John, viii. 11. If he, who was Lord of all, who read the secrets of hearts, and whose judgment was truth itself, whilst he most zealously reprehended the vices of all, would judge no one, shall we, without authority, without knowledge or justice, who, at most, see only the exterior of actions, presume to judge, to anticipate the divine justice, and to forestal the day appointed by God for his judgment! "You judge according to the flesh. I judge not any one. And if I judge, my judgment is true," said our divine Redeemer.—John, viii. 15. Whence, St. Paul conjures us: "Judge not before the time; until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of hearts."—1 Cor. iv. 5.

3. Rash judgment is also a grievous injury against our neighbour. A good reputation, and a reasonable esteem in the opinion of others, is undoubtedly one of the most valuable of temporal goods which a man can count in his possession. It is far preferable to riches, and second to nothing but life. We are bound to entertain this good opinion of our neighbour; and this is a strict right, due to him by the law of nature, unless he has forfeited it by his evident infamy. Doubtful claims are to be interpreted on the safer side, according to that dictate of the law of nature, and axiom of all positive laws: that no man is to be condemned, unless he stand first convicted. In case of groundless pretences and suspicions, he is not to be stripped of his birth-right. Hence, rash judgment against our neighbour is a sin against justice. It likewise transgresses the law of charity. It is the golden rule of the law of nature, acknowledged by the very infidels, that we do not that to others, which we would not that others should do to us. Now, put the case to be your own. Should another, on slight grounds, regard you as a hypocrite, a cheat, a drunkard, or the like, crimes which you abhor; or, should he interpret your innocent actions in a bad sense, and regard you with disdain and contempt in his heart, should not you think his proceeding highly injurious? How, then, can you justify the same conduct in yourselves? You may value yourself

on your large alms, strict justice in money affairs, long devotions: whilst you rashly judge others guilty, you cannot pass for innocent in the sight of God. You may detest theft; yet you are guilty of a more grievous injustice, and rob your neighbour of what is more precious than riches. You, perhaps, commit a greater crime than that would be, which you condemn in another, as St. Ambrose observes, Apol. David, c. 4.

It is not to be wondered at, that God condemns most severely this sin, which wounds our neighbour, and also attacks his divine Majesty in so tender a point. "If you knew what this meaneth: I will have mercy and not sacrifice, you would never have condemned the innocent," Matt. xii. 7, says our blessed Saviour. He has moreover made the observance of this precept our own special interest, by positively declaring that he, in the dreadful day of his justice, will judge us according to the rule which we shall have followed in judging our neighbours. "Judge not, that you may not be judged. For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged; and with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again."—Matt. vii. 1, 2. "Be ye, therefore, merciful, as your Father is merciful. Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned."—Luke, vi. 36, 37. St. Anastasius the Sinaite relates a remarkable example from his own knowledge (loco cit.) A certain monk, who had led a very tepid and negligent life, obtained the grace of a sincere conversion, and was favoured in his last sickness with the vision of an angel, in which he was assured that he should find mercy and pardon, because he had never judged ill of any, and had always forgiven all injuries. After which he met death with incredible joy and confidence, and smiling under the pangs of his agony and death, passed to glory.

4. Men not only judge without authority, and in defiance of justice, charity, and the express law of God, and by an insolent invasion of his supreme right; but also without knowledge of the cause. Their judgment is often false even concerning external actions or obligations. "Vain are the sons of men; the sons of men are liars in the balances;" Ps. lxi. 10; *i. e.*, they often weigh things by false weights; often some condemn what others applaud, and few attain to the truth. At least they do not see all the circumstances of the actions of others, and never penetrate their hearts or secret intentions, upon which all depends before God. "God alone is the discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."—Heb. iv. 12. "Neither is there any creature invisible

in his sight; but all things are naked and open to his eyes."—v. 13. But men in this world are blind, short-sighted, and liable to a thousand errors even in their own concerns; and infinitely more so in those of others. God will at the last day place all the secrets of hearts in the noon-day light; but now we are all in darkness. During the winter, when the country is covered with snow, all the earth wears the same appearance; we cannot then discern the objects which lie upon it, but are easily deceived in our conjectures. We may take a deep ditch to be the high road, or mistake a dunghill for a delightful garden, or a barren oak for a fruit-tree. This life is like winter; everything is as it were covered and concealed. Yet we foolishly pretend to know almost all things we see, and confidently judge of the actions of others, which are of all other things the most impenetrable to us, and which it is the highest arrogance for us to pronounce upon.

5. Men blind themselves by so many pretexts with regard to rash judgment, that though it be, perhaps, one of the most common of all sins, yet few ever think themselves guilty of it. They frequently persuade themselves that they judge upon sufficient grounds, or that it is not in a matter of weight, or the like. We must, however, take notice, that unless the judgment be rash, it is not of itself criminal. If the guilt be evident, we are not commanded to renounce our reason or our senses; nor can it ever be lawful to extenuate the crime by excusing or defending the sin itself. To understand the nature of the sin, we must distinguish four degrees in rash judgment: a doubt, a suspicion, a probable judgment, and a firm or certain judgment. A doubt is when the mind floats between two opinions, so as neither to incline to the one side nor to the other. To suspect the evil is to lean towards an assent; to believe it probably true is to assent, but with hesitation, and thinking that the opposite may possibly be true. A firm judgment excludes all doubt or hesitation. Any of these four degrees, if perfect and fully deliberate in a point considerably disadvantageous to our neighbour, is a mortal sin both against justice and against charity. Some divines rank mere doubts and suspicions among venial sins, unless they proceed from hatred or some other criminal passion; because, say they, St. Augustin (Tract. 90. in Joan. t. 3, p. 720), and St. Thomas (c. 2. 2. qu. 60, a. 3, quodl. 12. q. 22, art. 34, fol. 161, t. 8) rank suspicions among those sins of human frailty, without which this life is not led. But they speak of light or passing suspicions, which are not perfect and fully deliberate: for St. Thomas says: "If a man begin

to doubt of the probity of another;" and St. Augustin: "We cannot perceive our own suspicions." And in other places both these holy doctors declare suspicions or doubtful judgments to be mortal sins. St. Thomas, qu. 70, a. 4, writes: "Whoever harbours a bad opinion of another, without sufficient cause, does him an injury and despises him. Where the evidence of another's malice is not manifest, we are bound to esteem him good by putting a good construction on what is doubtful." See also qu. 69, a. 3, ad. 3. And St. Augustin, Serm. 306, Ol. 112. de Div. c. 9, t. 5, p. 1242. "Most of the evils among men arise from false suspicions. You suspect that a man hates you, who perhaps loves you, and by this evil suspicion become his enemy. What shall he do whom you do not believe? He cannot show you his heart." And Ep. 153. Ol. 54: "We almost all love to call or believe our suspicions to be a knowledge." And l. 2. de Serm. Domini in Monte, c. 18, t. 3, p. 224, on those words, "Judge not:" "We are commanded to interpret well actions in which the motive is doubtful." And in Ps. 147, p. 1660, t. 4: "Peace does not judge in doubts, does not condemn what she does not know; is inclined rather to believe well than to suspect ill: she says, I know not what he is. What do I lose, if I believe him to be a good man? It is lawful to be upon our guard, lest he should be otherwise; but condemn him not. This is what peace commands us." These doctors, therefore, agree with the rest of the Fathers, from whom several passages are gathered by Natalis Alexander, &c. Whence the best divines teach,* that a suspicion and doubt in a matter of weight is a mortal sin, if it be very rash and groundless, and if the mind deliberately harbour it, at least for a considerable time. For the interior act of the will is a mortal sin, when the exterior act would be such, *i. e.*, a grievous injustice and prejudice. And such a suspicion, when fully deliberate, permanent, and unjust, is a real grievous injury; *e. g.*, that a person is dishonest, lustful, &c.

6. That evil is to be looked on as a matter of great consequence, which is a great infamy or prejudice; as the imputation of any mortal sin, unless in the case of a person who shows by his conduct that he disregards what others may think, *e. g.*, by living in a public habit of drinking, swearing, &c. Also some wilful sin attributed to a person of eminent virtue, or any natural defect of

* Dom. Soto, Medina, Bannes, Sayrus, Sylvius, Henric, a S. Ignat. Nat. Alex. Antoine, Collet, &c.

birth, capacity, &c., will be grievously injurious. If the judgment or suspicion be not rash, but prudent and on sufficient grounds, it is not of its own nature any breach of this precept; and the grounds which would not excuse a formed positive judgment may sometimes suffice to make a suspicion reasonable and just. But there is danger of iniquity lying to itself; for men always imagine their most unjust opinions to be reasonable and prudent. This arises from the blinds and prejudices of self-love and pride; whereas the passions and want of charity make things appear certain, which are not even probable. Let us examine some of the grounds on which men judge of the actions of others.

*First*, divines agree with St. Thomas, that a public report cannot found a prudent judgment. A public fame, which is a constant and uniform voice of the people, grounded on the known testimony of persons of prudence and authority, that would amount to a half proof in civil, though not in criminal causes, is of weight, and may deserve our assent; but a rumour, without any certain author or known grounds, is the most deceitful and false of all vouchers. Daily experience must convince us that such reports generally owe their rise to malice, suspicions, or mistakes; or at least they have been entirely changed by the rehearsers, even credible persons in other respects, especially in cases of enmity; consequently such rumours can never be grounds to condemn another upon. When the clamour of Sodom was multiplied, "The Lord said, I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry which is come unto me."—Gen. xviii. 20, 21. Say always before you believe a report, I know not; I must see first. A prince who acts otherwise, and believes informers and tale-bearers, is easily imposed upon by calumnies, and multiplies injustices and evils. Prov. xxix. Others make their rash suppositions and suspicions pass for demonstrations and convictions; will you encourage and believe them, and yet pretend to be innocent?

"Never entertain any disadvantageous opinions of your neighbour; never give way to groundless suspicions and rash judgments concerning him; but throw them back, when they offer themselves, with a reflection upon yourself. Lord, how quick-sighted am I in regard to the faults of others; but how blind in discovering my own? A charitable man makes the most candid judgment of every body; and when his neighbour's actions are capable of a double interpretation, he puts the best upon them. The ordinary rule of judging others is by ourselves; and when our own inclina-

tions are bad, and our wills bent upon that which is evil, we easily persuade ourselves, that our neighbour governs himself by the same measure."—Nelson.

*Secondly*, it is a common but uncertain way of reasoning; only such a one could have committed the theft or other crime. Men know not how the thing was stolen; so they imagine it could not be done any other way but that which occurs to them. Nothing can be more precarious than this random sort of conjecture; and if we examine we shall not find one in a thousand that is censured upon it really guilty.

*Thirdly*, because they observe some circumstances in the behaviour of another, and see them exposed to an occasion, they conclude him guilty. But often what is an occasion to one may not be so to another; or some necessity placed him in it, and he may have triumphed over the danger.

7. Suppose you see one commit an action, which appears evil to you, charity will find many excuses. If the malice be doubtful, it commands us always to interpret it favourably. What you think unlawful, another may regard as lawful, and be excused before God. Nothing can be more unreasonable than for you to arraign another upon your private opinion, whilst he has as much right to be of another. "Let every one abound in his own sense, and let not him who eats despise him who fasts."—Rom. xiv. 3. If you are better instructed in the truth, keep your gift in God; but do not condemn the conscience of others. In a word, so many circumstances in the actions of others may deceive us, that it is generally very rash in us to pronounce them guilty. Outward appearances are very deceitful. St. John the alms-giver was accustomed often to relate several examples of great servants of God, who had been falsely condemned, and often where all circumstances had concurred to make them appear guilty. Whereupon he used frequently to exclaim: "How many hidden servants has Almighty God unknown to the world, and condemned by men!" Heli reproached Hannah with drunkenness, for what was the effect of affliction and fervour of prayer. The Pharisee condemned St. Mary Magdalen, when she was a saint. We cannot see the heart of a neighbour; yet it is on this that the action depends. Excuse, then, the action by the intention.

If the malice be too evident, true charity will never fail to suggest excuses, which at least will extenuate the crime. Christ found one for the greatest of sins possible, that of his crucifiers: "They know not what they do." Say to yourself, that the sin

was committed, perhaps, through ignorance, surprise, accident, or at least some sudden and violent temptation.* You know not how many conflicts your brother sustained before he fell; how long he resisted; nor how gloriously he may rise again. Reflect on your own deserts and unworthiness, and fear lest you do worse to-morrow than he has done to-day. Judas became a traitor, and the thief on the cross a saint in an instant. Therefore, judge no one, lest you judge one whom you will see above you in glory.

8. Three things are necessary to a just sentence or judgment: jurisdiction, knowledge of the cause, and justice or equity. We have seen, that the two first are wanting in rash judgment. The third condition is still more essentially wanting, as will plainly appear if we consider what are the sources from which it springs. It is a sin, that can be the effect only of an excessive corruption of the heart, and of superlative malice. No provocation, no pleasure, no interest, induce men to it, but merely the depravity of the will. The first grand root of rash judgments is antipathy, dissension, or hatred. This uncharitable disposition of the heart turns everything that our supposed enemy can say or do, to a bad sense. It is inconceivable, how many rash judgments and suspicions proceed from it. A second no less fertile source is envy or jealousy. If a person have conceived a displeasure against another; or if he looks upon others as his rivals in reputation, esteem, or any qualification, he turns his eyes from all their perfections, and can find nothing but faults in all they do. He finds a secret pleasure in hearing others censure them, and so far blinds himself as to call this base passion holy zeal. Their most virtuous actions are criminal in his eyes. The Pharisees were no sooner prepossessed by envy and hatred against Christ, than his divine countenance, which had charms of virtue to all others, seemed to breathe nothing but hypocrisy to them. His words were imposture, and his miracles the effects of art and magic in their opinion. Matt. ix. A third parent of rash judgment is vice. A man addicted to a vicious habit has a strange propensity to judge of others by himself. Eccl. x. St. Augustin, l. 3. Doctr. Christ. c. 19, observes, that the lustful imagine no one can live entirely chaste, and think the innocent actions of others tainted with that foul passion. Suetonius mentions, that Nero would not be persuaded that any other men lived more chaste, but said they were only hypocrites, and com-

* "Excusa intentionem si opus non potes; puta ignorantiam, puta subreptionem, puta casum," says St. Bernard, Serm. 40. in Cant. p. 1411.

mitted the same crimes, though privately. Thus the ambitious, the covetous, the revengeful, &c., measure the hearts of others by their own, in the actions which they see them perform. Men, therefore, by rashly condemning others, seem to betray the vices of their own hearts, especially an intolerable pride, which is a fourth and general cause of rash judgments. Humility is always occupied on its own sins and miseries. But pride is blind to these, and, whilst it seeks to prefer itself to others, studies to pry into and condemn their actions. So monstrous are the blindness and partiality of mankind in this respect, that most men take a malignant pleasure in judging ill of others, so that neither good nor bad can pass unreproved. If a man be free and affable, they call him light; if retired, haughty or melancholy; if cheerful, dissolute or mad. Virtue with them is design, craft, and hypocrisy; good-nature, dulness. The Jews said that St. John Baptist had a devil, because he fasted; and they called Christ a glutton and a drunkard, because they saw him eat and drink. Luke, vii. 33. How many condemn others for crimes which they themselves commit? We see men every day imitate Achilles, who, whilst he was in the utmost fury himself, reproached Agamemnon with his passionate temper; and Agamemnon, who, while he was revenging a rape, committed another. Whence St. Paul says to those who fall into rash judgment: "Wherefore thou art inexcusable, O man! whoever judgest. For when thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou doest the things thou judgest."—Rom. ii. 1. Hence the ancient proverb, that men throw their own sins into a wallet behind their backs, but carry those of others before them always under their eyes; and St. Augustin describes men "as curious in prying into the conduct of others, but slow in correcting their own."—Conf. l. 10, c. 2.

We may reduce all these sources of rash judgment to two: uncharitableness and pride. Charity and humility are the sovereign remedies of this disorder. "Charity thinks no evil."—1 Cor. xiii. It inclines a man to the most favourable judgment of others in everything. Those whom we truly love we always study to excuse. We are blind to their real faults, as we may see in fond parents. Thus true charity is edified at everything, and is ingenious in finding excuses for whatever may seem amiss; because its pleasure is in the good and happiness of every neighbour. Humility, likewise, is occupied in censuring and correcting its own faults, and finds ample matter of solicitude at home; it sees only its own sins. Our Saviour refers us to this consideration, when he says: "Why dost thou see a straw in thy brother's

eye, whilst thou seest not a beam in thy own?"—Matt. vii. 2. It is not zeal, but pride, which seeks to correct others, without first amending its own scandalous faults. You will never convert your neighbour, unless you begin by yourself; then it will appear that you seek the honour of God. "First throw out the beam," &c. "You are not appointed judge of others' sins, nor has God given you any charge to pry into their hearts. You are commanded to judge yourself, not others. But you have inverted the order, and neglect to take any account of your own sins, but sift those of others. If you will consider others, examine not their sins, but have their good works before your eyes to stir up yourself to emulation in virtue," says St. Chrysostom, Hom. 65, al. 66, in Mat. t. 7, p. 643.

If others judge us, we must follow the advice of St. Gregory Nazianzen, who writes, Ep. 67: "Look upon them as jackdaws watching the flight of an eagle. Have God only in view, and you will never go amiss." And, Or. ad eos qui ipsam cathedram etiam affectare dicebant!—"Others' judgments concerning us ought no more to interest us than their dreams."

As to the precept of not judging others, prudence, and the charity which we owe to ourselves, oblige us to be upon our guard as carefully as if we judged others treacherous, because we know that the world abounds with impiety and falsehood, and without this precaution we shall betray ourselves into certain ruin. But we must satisfy this duty without judging or suspecting others rashly, as St. Thomas observes. Parents, masters, and all superiors must watch and correct the faults of those under their charge. But all must shun rash judgment; this is of the strictest precept. Where the duty of a superior, or the like circumstances, do not oblige us to examine in order to correct sins, never to judge at all is a virtue and counsel of our divine Redeemer of great importance. And the more perfectly we perform this lesson, the more shall we be entitled to find mercy. God will measure his mercy, and the rigour of his justice towards us, by our practice of this rule. O happy virtue! which will make that trial, the thought of which was terrible to the Jeromes and Hilarions, joyful and easy to us; which will secure us on that day when the pillars of heaven shall tremble. "Judgment without mercy shall be to those who have not shown mercy."—James, ii. 13. Let us not pervert the order which God has appointed, but judge ourselves, not others. Let us imitate those holy solitaries, at least in our hearts, who, being assembled to judge a criminal, all arose, and went out weeping.

## DISCOURSE XXV.

### THE SACRAMENTS IN GENERAL.

"Jesus stood and cried, saying: If any man thirst, let him come to me, and drink."—John, vii. 37.

1. Is it not a most surprising thing to see Almighty God descend personally on earth, clothed with a human body like ours, that he might open to us the immense treasures of his heavenly riches, and bestow them in all abundance on all that would accept of them; and yet that men should be so negligent in running in to receive them? Did your prince make an offer to heap all his honours and treasures on every one that would come and ask for them, how eagerly would all run and strive to be the first to partake of his so generous bounty? But God, not content with this, adds the most pressing invitations and threats to compel us, as I may say, to accept of his divine graces, which he most plentifully offers us in his most holy sacraments. Though he be the eternal Wisdom, yet his delight is to be with the sons of men; and that he might always remain with, and unite himself, by his spiritual graces, more closely to our souls, he left us these sacraments as the most assured pledges of his divine love, and most urgently presses us to approach and taste of his sweetness; to partake of his infinite treasures and love. "He who is thirsty, and who will receive, let him drink of the water of life gratis."—Apoc. xxii. 17. And again: "I will give to the thirsty, of the fountain of living water gratis."—Apoc. xxi. 6. And by his prophet: "Come, all ye that thirst, to the waters; and ye that have no money, hasten, buy, and fill yourselves; come, buy without money, or any exchange, wine and milk," *i. e.*, my heavenly graces.—Isa. lv. 1. And our Redeemer himself, in the words of my text, went up to the temple—John, vii. 37—on the great festival of Tabernacles, when all the Jews were obliged to meet there, and standing up, cried out: "If any one be thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me," says the Scripture, "streams of living water shall spring out and flow from his bowels. But this he said of the Holy Ghost," to be received after his resurrection by his holy sacraments, as the evangelist expounds it.

Let us not, dear Christians, be rebellious to the divine light,

let us not reject such gracious offers, and shut our ears to the tender invitations of our God and Saviour; let us not refuse such heavenly favours, which our Redeemer procured for us at the expense of so many labours and pains, and of his most precious blood. To prevent our ever being so much our own enemies, a few reflections on so important a subject may be of great benefit. For this purpose, my design is, first, briefly to explain what a sacrament is; and in my second part, to speak a word or two on the abuses of these sacred treasures of grace, too common among Christians. Let us first implore the intercession of the mother of grace and mercy. Ave Maria.

A sacrament of the New Law is a visible sign of invisible grace, instituted by Christ for our justification. Let us, if you please, explain each word apart. It is a visible, a sensible sign; "for no society of men could ever be joined in any religion, whether true or false, unless tied together by the bond of external signs or sacraments."—Cat. Trid. part. 2, n. 5, Conc. Trid. Sess. 13, cap. 3; St. Aug. lib. cont. Faust. c. 11, p. 319. Thus the Old Law had a multitude of sacrifices, expiations, sacraments, and sensible ceremonies; for men are so addicted to their senses, that what we cannot perceive by them, what, *e. g.*, we neither see, nor touch, nor feel, seldom greatly affects us. Hence it was proper, that the divine Providence should institute some sensible sacraments, says St. Thomas, 3. part. c. 960, ut in Cat.; St. Bonav. Centiloqu. 3, p. sect. 47. Christ was pleased to condescend so far to our weakness, that, though his graces are purely spiritual gifts, he vouchsafes to confer them on our souls by means of sensible signs. "Had we been incorporeal, God would have given us his graces in a purely spiritual manner," says St. Chrysost. Hom. 8. in Matt.; "but because our souls are joined to bodies, he conveys them by these sensible signs." Hence you see why all the sacraments have something sensible, which is called their matter; but for this to become a holy sign of the internal grace, it must be joined with a form of words instituted by Christ, and pronounced by the proper minister, whilst he applies the matter: for, *e. g.*, without this form, "I baptize," &c., water would not be determined to signify a cleansing of the soul from sin, and adorning it with sanctifying grace, but would be only a common washing. "Words must be pronounced over the material element to make a sacrament."*—St. Aug. Tract. 80. in Joan. "Take away this

* Accedit verbum ad elementum et fit sacramentum.

form of words," says St. Augustin, "and the water of baptism is no more than common water;" ib. tom. 3, part. 2, p. 703; "but in the sacrament it becomes the living instrument of grace." "Water would never have the power to cleanse the soul, but by virtue of the words."—St. Aug. Ibid. Have we not great reason to render immortal thanks to Almighty God, who, to conform himself to our weak capacities, is pleased to annex his graces to such sensible signs, that we might more easily be excited to receive them with devotion, and make ourselves partakers of them at pleasure?

But let us consider why they are called signs. They are signs, *first*, of Christ's passion, the merits of which they apply to our souls. "In Christ Jesus and in his Name we are baptized."—Rom. vi. 3. *Secondly*, of our eternal future felicity: "It shall be unto him a fountain of living water unto life everlasting."—John, iv. 14. *Thirdly*, and chiefly, of the interior graces, which each sacrament actually confers. Thus, when, *ex. g.*, you see a person baptized, regard not what you see with the eyes of your body, but consider what you know by faith, and imagine you see with the eyes of your soul, at the same time that the water is poured on the body, the invisible hand of God cleansing the soul from all sin, and making it, by his grace, beautiful and acceptable in his sight, his adoptive son and heir to eternal glory. For the water, duly joined with the form, has truly the virtue to sanctify the soul. "The waters are impregnated with grace and a power of sanctification; the body is washed that the soul may be cleansed; the body is anointed that the soul may be consecrated:"—Tertull. l. de Baptis. c. 4. In confirmation, "the body is signed that the soul may be strengthened; the body receives the imposition of hands, that the soul may be enlightened by the divine Spirit:" —Idem, l. de Resurr. Carnis, c. 8, p. 330. In the blessed Eucharist, "the flesh is nourished by the body and blood of Christ, that the soul may be filled with God, and fattened with his grace."

Hence it is clear, as the Council of Trent has defined, that all the sacraments must have been instituted by Christ our Redeemer and our God; for God alone can be the author of all grace, and consequently no other could annex an infallible promise of it to feeble signs, which of themselves bear no proportion to such an effect. Again, only Christ, as man personally joined to this God by the incarnation, could, by suffering, satisfy for our sins, and communicate to our souls, by any sacraments, the graces of so plen-

tiful a redemption. Whence it is plain that Christ alone, true God and true man, could be the author of the sacraments of the New Law. The sacraments or ceremonies of the Old Law were a burden, by reason of their multitude, and of themselves "weak and feeble."—Gal. iv. 9. "They only promised, in a great measure, that grace which ours confer."—St. Aug. contra Faust, l. 19, c. 8. But Christ instituted sacraments, which, for excellence and virtue, bear no proportion with those of the Old Law, and which are truly worthy of so great and plentiful a redemption; all of easy access, few in number, and yet adapted to all the necessities of the Church, viz.: the sacrament of Baptism, or regeneration, by which we are freed from the tyranny of sin, and re-born to God (St. Thomas in Cat. Trid.); Confirmation, to make us strong and perfect in grace; Eucharist, to be our spiritual food and nourishment; and, in case we should fall again, he left Penance as a plank after shipwreck; Extreme Unction, to comfort and help us in our passage to eternity; Order, to provide his Church with proper pastors; and that of Matrimony for its increase and propagation, and to be a help against the difficulties and dangers of that state. Nor has he left these to be had in one place only of the world, or at certain times only, or by great labour and expenses, but easily, in all places, at all times, whensoever we are willing to receive them. Were they to be procured only in one remote corner of the earth, or once in a hundred years, how should we esteem such great treasures? And ought we to regard them less because God's bounty has been so munificent to us? But what seems, above all, to extol God's mercy in them is, that they depend not on the faith or devotion of the minister; though he be a sinner or a heretic, they nevertheless produce the graces in the receiver; nay, though they be unworthily received, they cease not to be sacraments. Christ was pleased to permit his adorable body and blood, his very divinity, and all the treasures of his heavenly graces, to pass through the hands of the greatest sinners, yet without being defiled himself, as the sun's beams pass undefiled through the most noisome bodies; and this that he might communicate himself to us, converse always with us, and be our protector, our physician, our all himself. "My beloved to me, and I to him." Have we not great reason to congratulate ourselves on our so happy circumstances, and to adore and praise God's infinite mercy to us, who has made us be born sons of this law of grace, and partakers of such immense heavenly treasures? The ancient patriarchs and

prophets sighed earnestly after this, and no expressions can be more sublime than those by which the Holy Ghost, by their mouths, described the spiritual riches and magnificence of the New Law, the Messiah's spiritual kingdom. They exulted in spirit to think on those happy days, and rejoiced beyond measure to foresee them by God's revelation. "Abraham saw and rejoiced." We live in this spiritual kingdom of Christ amidst so great blessings, and such powerful helps and sacraments. These are those times of which Isaiah said so many years ago: "You shall draw water in joy from the fountains of the Saviour."—Isa. xii. 3. Yet (can we speak it without tears?) how little benefit do we reap from so great favours! Do not we frequently turn these blessings into poison to our own destruction? and what a damnation do we thus prepare for ourselves! "How shall we escape if we neglect such powerful means of salvation?"—Heb. ii. 3. A reflection or two on this point shall form my second part.

2. Among all the disorders that reign among Christians, none is so general, so dangerous, so criminal, as the great abuse of the holy sacraments, which may be called the source of all that impiety we see among them. Our blessed Saviour wept over Jerusalem, because that chosen city of God had made no other use of his distinguishing favours than to reject and abuse them; "because thou hast not known the time of thy visitation."—Luc. xix. 44. And is there not more reason to deplore now the most horrid sacrileges and profanations of the sacraments daily committed by Christians? Our loving Redeemer instituted the sacraments as conduits, by means of which he communicates himself to us, and makes us partakers of his heavenly graces. This means Divine Wisdom invented that he might always remain with us, and intimately join himself to our souls, so that, though we do not see him suffer on Mount Calvary for us, nor can be bathed under his cross, yet, by the holy sacraments, we have our souls truly purified and washed by his precious blood applied to them. We honour the relics of saints, churches, altars, or whatever belongs to the divine worship; with what awe and reverence, then, ought we to look upon the holy sacraments, which are the lively instruments of God's graces (Conc. Trid.), the vessels of the spiritual riches he has bestowed on his Church, the sacred depositories of the price of our redemption, the adorable blood of Christ, the merits of which they actually communicate to our souls? "All of us who have been baptized in Christ Jesus were baptized in his death."—Rom. vi. 3. Did we see the Holy Ghost descend visibly

in the sacraments, as he did on Christ when baptized in the Jordan; did we see such visible miraculous effects caused by them as the descent of the Holy Ghost wrought usually by confirmation in the primitive Church, we should be moved to regard them in a different manner from what we do. And have we no eyes but those of the body? Does not faith teach us far greater things concerning them? Yet, how do men impiously profane these most sacred tokens of love, and most adorable mysteries of religion! These horrid and common sacrileges the ministers of the sacraments daily deplore, prostrate at the foot of the altar; and every Christian that has the least spark of the love of God, or zeal for his honour and our neighbour's good, ought to weep with tears of blood to see the most holy things of the divine worship so sacrilegiously profaned by God's own chosen people; to see God so grievously injured in what he deserves the greatest homages for; and to see Christians, for whom they were instituted, turn these antidotes and preservatives into the mortal poison of their souls, to make the means of their salvation serve for their most grievous damnation, and to expose the precious blood of Christ, and the merits of his sacred passion, to become the subject of the devil's triumph. You will ask me here, who are guilty of these common abuses? I answer, in short, all those who neglect to approach them, and those who approach them without due dispositions.

*First*, I say, all who neglect frequently to receive the sacraments are guilty of a grievous and most dangerous crime and ingratitude. Of this we shall be easily convinced if we consider what we believe concerning them. The sacraments are the vessels of the divine grace (Conc. Trid.), and necessary for all Christians, though not all for every one, or at all times; we believe they are the only food and nourishment of our souls, to preserve and maintain their spiritual life; the only remedies in all spiritual diseases, the only comfortatives in weaknesses; in a word, they only, when they can be procured, both give and maintain in us grace, the life of the soul: "for it is by them all true justice is begun in us, increased or perfected, and when lost repaired."—Ib. Sess. 7. Can we, then, be so far our own enemies as to neglect so necessary a means for acquiring eternal happiness? It is an established law of the Divine Providence, that the sacraments should be the ordinary means by which God conveys his graces into our souls. Do you, then, imagine that God will break his established law, and work a miracle in favour

of sinners, who, through sloth and contempt, refuse to make use of the means by which he offers his graces? Would it not be an extreme madness for a man to throw himself from the top of a precipice, in hopes that God, by a miracle against the ordinary course of nature, would protect him? Yet, let me tell you, that their case is a more unpardonable presumption. To resist God's inspirations and graces is always the most ungenerous step of hardened sinners; for this forces God to draw back his liberal hand, and leave them to their own destruction. "Because I have stretched out my hand, and you will not regard me, therefore you shall call upon me and I will not hear you. I will laugh at you in your destruction." What, then, shall we think of those who so outrageously contemn him in the very fountains of grace, but that such souls will be left defenceless to the fury of the enemy? "They shall surround thee, they shall straiten thee on every side; they shall level thee with the ground, and shall not leave one stone on another, because thou hast not known the time of thy visitation."—Luc. xix. 43, 44. Should we, out of wilful stubbornness, refuse the gracious offers of a bountiful prince, would he not be justly offended, and afford us no more of his bounty or protection? God will doubtless remove from such ungrateful sinners his paternal care, leaving them abandoned to themselves. It is of them he has sworn: "Not one of those men shall taste of my supper." To avoid this terrible curse, let us be particularly careful to approach the sacraments, especially those of confession and communion, which we ought always to do at least once a month, as we value our salvation; and the other sacraments in their due times. But let it be with fervour and devotion; for the abuses are still far more grievous and more common of such as receive the sacraments without due dispositions. I say, far more dangerous, if possible, and far more grievous. Any sacrilege is, of its own nature, a crime so execrable, that nothing is more odious even among men. Other sins aim not so directly at the Divinity itself; but sacrilege immediately attacks the divine worship by a declared rebellion against God, and tramples on all that is most sacred. Now, nothing in religion is so holy as the sacraments. Churches, sacred vessels, &c., are principally sacred, only because they are consecrated to the service of God and to the use of the sacraments. Yet to profane a church, or to break down an altar, all persons regard as a monstrous impiety; and a Christian guilty of such a crime is justly excommunicated and cut off from the

number of the faithful, as being worse than an infidel, who, if he profane these holy things, believes not that they belong to the true divine worship. King Balthassar had his destiny written by an invisible hand on the wall for daring to profane the vessels of the temple instituted for the sacrifices of the Old Law. If God showed such exemplary punishments for these lesser sacrileges, what does he reserve for those who pollute his most holy sanctuary, his sanctuary of the New Law? "A man transgressing the law of Moses, convicted by two or three witnesses, died without pity; how much more severe shall the punishment of him be who tramples on the Son of God, and pollutes the blood of the New Testament, by which he was sanctified, and insults the Spirit of grace?"—Heb. x. 28, 29. We read in St. Cyprian, that many in his time, for having unworthily received the blessed Eucharist, were immediately seized and frightfully tormented by the devil, and sometimes killed on the spot, and so carried straight to hell, to deter others from such sacrilegious attempts. These terrible chastisements ought to be an example and terror to us. Those unhappy wretches might plead frailty, and that they sinned, hoping after to repent: but we, seeing their exemplary punishment, have no excuse, and sin out of downright malice; and, though God does not now usually punish sacrileges in so sensible a manner, his vengeance is the more to be feared, the more occult it is. It is in punishment hereof that he delivers over so many thousands to a reprobate sense, to inveterate habits of swearing, gluttony, drunkenness, and other brutal sins, which St. Paul forbids a Christian even to name: hence he so often permits them to fall into a foolish presumption or despair; and it is a far greater punishment to live on in this manner, so as to heap up new treasures of wrath by new sins never repented for, than to be struck dead in sin. "It is better to die in sin than to live only to sin."—St. Amb.

These two propositions I dare boldly to advance: *First*, that this neglect of the sacraments is the cause of all the disorders we see among Christians; for it is impossible they could make a good use of them, while they live as the greater part of them do. *Secondly*, that there can be no greater certain mark of reprobation than this. If a patient should either obstinately reject a sovereign and only cure of his distemper, letting it thus hourly gain head; or should take it, but receive no benefit from it, would not you despair of his recovery? And is not this the case of such Christians? What can they expect, but that the

terrible curse of Christ be verified in them, for neglecting his gracious visits: "You will seek me, but you shall die in your sins." Let us, then, remember, that the sacraments are the healing balsams, the chief and only ordinary restorers and preservers of our spiritual life; that they cost our Redeemer the last drop of his precious blood. If we let one drop hereof fall to the ground, O what a terrible avenging justice will quickly overtake us! Approach, then, confidently to these fountains of grace, and receive the heavenly treasures here offered you; but approach with a spiritual thirst, with humility, fear, and trembling; say, with the Samaritan woman: "Lord, give me this water" (John, iv. 15), that you may deserve to receive those graces, which will be in your souls "a fountain of living water to bring you to eternal life," ib. v. 11; a happiness, &c.

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## DISCOURSE XXVI.

### ON THE VIRTUE OF PENANCE.

1. Penance may be considered either as it is a virtue, or as it has been raised by Christ to the dignity of a sacrament of the New Law. To understand it under the first character, it is defined by St. Thomas, 3 p. q. 85, a. 2, and in the schools: "A virtue, by which a man bewails and labours to destroy his past sin." For, it is a sorrow of the mind, and a detestation of sin committed, for the sake of God, with a resolution of appeasing him for the past, and of never offending him any more. It has, therefore, two parts, the one interior, which is the contrition or compunction of heart, consisting in the inward sorrow and detestation; the other, exterior, which consists in satisfactory works, by which the sinner labours to chastise himself for sin, and to satisfy the divine justice, by revenging sin on the offender, his own guilty heart and flesh. These two parts are inseparable: both must concur, at least in some degree, to constitute this virtue; for, though the interior be the most essential member, and, as it were, the soul of it, this cannot subsist without a firm will of practising the other part. Those who are for either the interior or the exterior alone, and without the other, embrace only a counterfeit and a shadow, without having the virtue of penance itself.

2. Penance is to be reckoned amongst the moral virtues; whereas, it is a good act, which has its peculiar object, and its special difficulty to overcome, by which it is distinguished from other virtues, and constitutes one by itself; for it alone is employed in removing and satisfying for sin. Also, it is criminal in a sinner not to grieve, and labour to satisfy for having sinned; or, to grieve for it to excess by despair. It must, therefore, be a virtue to regulate and govern this grief within its just bounds, so as by it to labour to remove and destroy sin in the guilty soul.

It is an absurd heresy, condemned by the Catholic Church, to pretend, that the virtue of penance requires nothing but a mere change of life; though, how can even this be without a sorrow for past sins? The holy Scripture, in every part, both in the Old and New Testament, requires expressly in penance a real sorrow, and also works of satisfaction; for, it joins with it groans, sighs, prayer, fasts, sackcloth, and ashes. Whence, all the Fathers, being instructed in its school, give only this essential idea of it: "It is not enough for a sinner to change his manners and depart from sin, unless he satisfies God for what he has done, by the sorrow of repentance, by the groans of humiliation, and by the sacrifice of a contrite heart, alms also accompanying," as St. Augustin says, Serm. 351, Ol. Kom. 50, inter. 50, n. 12, t. 5, p. 1361.

3. Penance is an infused virtue, and the gift of a particular grace. Though there may be a natural sorrow for sin, grounded on temporal motives, as on its temporal consequences, and natural baseness in the light of reason, which may help to draw the will from sin, yet this is not the true virtue of penance, which must be a sorrow for sin, conceived for God, produced by grace, grounded on supernatural motives proposed only by faith, such as the fear of hell, and the love of God. Hence, this virtue is not a plant of our own growth, but infused into our hearts by the Holy Ghost. Wherefore, Jeremy prays thus for it: "Convert me, and I shall be converted; because thou art the Lord my God. For after thou hast converted me, I have done penance." —Jer. xxxi. 18. It is given only through Jesus Christ, as being the precious fruit of his passion: Acts, v. 31; xi. 18. This is the doctrine of the holy Church, and the Council of Trent pronounces anathema against those who shall say, that a man can repent as he ought for justification, without the succour of the Holy Ghost. Sess. 6, an. 3. This is also manifest from the very

nature of this virtue; for the grace of justification being supernatural, the means conducing to it must be also supernatural, the means and the end being always necessarily in the same order. Therefore, faith, hope, the love of God, and repentance, must be all supernatural virtues. Such, then, is the nobleness of this virtue, that only the blood of Christ could purchase the least degree of it; and God alone can bestow it.

4. God always offers us this grace, as he desires not the death of any sinner, but that he be converted and live. But it is to be obtained by earnest prayer, as repentance is excited only "by the grace of God touching a man's heart," according to the words of the Council of Trent, Sess. 6, c. 5. Faith, a fear of God's judgments, a firm hope in his mercy, and his divine love, are its ingredients, and the dispositions which prepare and raise a soul to it.

5. Every man, both the just and the sinner, is indispensably bound to make the practice of this virtue the continual exercise of his whole life. It is necessary for obtaining the remission of any sin whatsoever. Its perpetual exercise is necessary for past mortal sin, for daily venial sin, and because it is the indispensable preservative against sin.

No mortal sin, whether hidden or known, can ever be forgiven without an explicit repentance. Venial sin requires, at least, an implicit act of repentance, such as is contained in an act of the love of God, by which the will is drawn from all attachment to that venial sin, and is implicitly sorry for it; that is, is so disposed that it would excite an actual sorrow and contrition for it, if it occurred to the mind. This truth is so evident a principle of reason itself, that St. Augustin, l. 2. de Anim. c. 14, q. p. 90, says: "No country or man can be so barbarous as to say a person does not lie under a necessity of repenting, if he shall have sinned. For the law of nature dictates, that whoever has sinned should repent of his offence, be sorry for what he has done, and seek a remedy." He says again, Ep. ad Vincent.: "Do not imagine that any one can pass from error to truth, or from any sin, whether great or small, to amendment, without repentance;" which words are related in the Canon Law, Dist. 1. de Pœnit. c. 43. And the Council of Trent, speaking of those who have forfeited God's grace, says: "Penance was at all times absolutely necessary to such, to recover grace and justice."—Sess. 14, c. 1. All sacrifices, sacraments, alms, or other the most holy actions, can never wash away any sin without penance. Hence,

God said to the Jews, who presumed on their sacrifices which they offered, without repenting of their sins: "Will holy flesh or victim take away from thee thy malices?"—Jeremy, xi. 15.

6. The exercise of the virtue of penance must be perpetual, during a man's whole life. Frequent acts of contrition are necessary not only for our daily venial, but also for fear of hidden mortal sins, which we may fall into without discovering them in ourselves. At least, we certainly fall into frequent venial offences; consequently we must perpetually have recourse to the remedy, and never cease, by the continual fresh application of it, immediately to heal the wounds we receive in our perpetual skirmishes with our spiritual enemies. This is to be done by bewailing our infidelities, by repeated acts of compunction; by assiduously praying for the forgiveness of them, as our blessed Redeemer has taught us, by making this one of the petitions he has put in our mouths in his divine prayer; also by offering frequent sacrifices, alms, fasts, and performing other penitential works, in the sentiments of sincere compunction; particularly by frequent examens of our hearts and actions to discover and correct immediately all even the least failings. Without this care they are very soon multiplied and formed into habits, leading to the most fatal consequences, as drops of rain multiplied raise great floods, which sometimes overturn the strongest buildings. The sink in a ship must be often pumped out, or the water, entering only by single drops, will at length fill and sink the vessel. A most scrupulous attention to find out and amend our smallest faults, especially in our predominant passions, is absolutely necessary to stop their progress, and to enable us to maintain our ground in the service of God. This is, therefore, the constant employment of all saints during their whole lives. "This is the perpetual labour of the just in this life," says St. Gregory, Mor. l. 11, c. 21, "to discover, and, by weeping and correcting all faults, to amend themselves continually."

7. If a soul be conscious of having ever committed any one mortal sin, certainly she can never cease doing penance for it as long as she lives. She has repented of it; but is she sure that her contrition and atonement were such as to have satisfied the divine justice, at least entirely, and to have blotted out all the remains of sin, and the punishment due to it? Ah! St. Bernard, that innocent dove of the Church, was quite overwhelmed with dread and horror, as often as he called to mind the uncertainty of grace. Serm. 23. in Cant. St. Paul himself, that great apostle

and incarnate seraph of divine love, trembled at the same reflection. How ought we, then, to fear? We, who know that we have on many occasions provoked the anger of God and deserved his eternal hatred. How terrifying a thought is it! I am certain that I have offended God, but am uncertain whether I have yet satisfied his infinite justice and obtained pardon. Ah! my soul, I will always labour to perfect my penance. "Be not without fear for sin that is forgiven."—Eccl. v. 5.

Even though a penitent had received an assurance of pardon, as St. Peter and St. Mary Magdalen did from the mouth of Christ himself, and David by the prophet Nathan, yet he ought, with them, to prolong his penance till death. Can a soul, that loves God, remember she has ever offended so great and good a Father, without grieving afresh for it? If her crime be remitted, this is owing only to the infinite and undeserved mercy of God, the remembrance of which ought the more to excite her tears for having been rebellious against such a God; for her impiety and ingratitude are not the less on account of his mercy. Their enormity appears but the greater, as God's goodness shines the more by this. A rebel, who was pardoned by his gracious king, and restored to all his dignities and possessions, could not but be thereby moved the more to regret his past treasons, as often as they returned to his mind. So must the true penitent continue his penance for his sin all his life; as his crime, even by the fullest pardon, can never be undone. It was committed; it cannot now be hindered. Being effaced by pardon, it remains an eternal monument of God's mercy to the sinner indeed; but it is still true that he had rebelled against his Creator. St. Mary Magdalen, with all her tears, could not undo her sins. That she had offended God is still eternally true. In seeing them blotted out, she admired, praised, and loved the more her infinitely merciful Creator; but even in this she read the characters of her past baseness, and was stirred up to fresh tears. This is the wound which bleeds in all true penitents during their whole lives, and makes the sources of their tears never to dry up.

8. Holy David, though assured by God that his sin was forgiven him, yet lived a model to penitents until the end of the world, and, by the Psalms of repentance which he composed, furnished all, in every future age, with the most feeling sentiments and expressions of compunction, which were dictated to him, in his spirit of perfect penance, by the Holy Ghost himself, the true Master of the heart in this virtue. Nor content thus to pour forth

his soul continually in penitential prayer, every night, instead of closing his eyes to sleep, he watered his bed with his tears; and they were so frequent and so abundant in the day, that he says they were to him as his food and drink. He laid aside his purple to clothe himself with hair and sackcloth, though by these humiliations, and by those penitential weeds, he exposed himself to be the scorn and table-talk of all his subjects, as he testifies. We must remember, that he was justified by the assurance of God himself upon his repentance immediately after his fall; yet such was his severe penitential life, such his spirit of compunction. A court, the affairs of a kingdom, company, pleasures, nothing was able to divert his mind from his sin. He had offended God, and accordingly could never moderate or put an end to his sorrow but with his life. "My grief," says he ever after, "is always in my sight."—Ps. xxxvii. 18. "My sin is always against me."—Ps. l. 4. How contrary is the practice of those superficial penitents, who, as soon as they are returned from confession, seem to forget that they had sinned! Must not their repentance have been very imperfect, their idea of an offence of God very weak?

St. Mary Magdalen heard from the Saviour of the world that her sins were forgiven her, because she loved much. Yet because she loved truly, she was not able to set bounds to her penance till death finished it. With reason does St. Gregory the Great say of her, Hom. 33. in Evang.: "When I think of the penance of a Mary Magdalen, I am moved to weep rather than speak anything of it. For whose, even strong breast, do not the tears of that sinner move to sentiments of compunction? She considered what she had done, and therefore would not set any bounds to what she was to do."

St. Peter not only was pardoned, but raised by Christ to the highest spiritual dignities and honours, and vested with the greatest graces and supernatural gifts; yet neither the most ample and assured patent of full pardon, nor length of time, nor God's singular favours, nor the conversion of nations, the solicitude of all churches, nor his perpetual labours, fatigues, and sufferings for Christ, were ever able to make him forget his offence, or interrupt his penitential tears. To his last hour, he never heard the cock crow without weeping bitterly at the remembrance of his sin. We cannot, without astonishment, read in the lives of many holy solitaries and others, the long and most severe penances to which they condemned themselves, and often for the slightest venial stains of youth, or only apprehensions of a greater offence:

an Eusebius, living always chained and bowed down to the ground, to punish himself for a short distraction in listening to the word of God; an Ephrem, continually weeping for a mere childish trick of play, in pursuing a cow till it fell down a precipice; a Macarius, living a prodigy of austerities, chiefly lamenting a theft of two or three figs, when a child. Ah! if we do not imitate perfectly these patterns of true penance, at least we cannot but follow them at a distance, remembering always our past sins in the bitterness of our souls, praying daily to be perfectly cleansed from them, and adding perpetually works of satisfaction to expiate them.

9. Oh! my soul, what can I look upon in the whole world that does not refresh the remembrance of my sins, and oblige me to melt into tears? Can I look up to heaven, and not weep at the sight of that glorious kingdom, which I basely renounced, at the remembrance of that gracious Father and Lord of Majesty whom I rebelled against, and of those blessed spirits whose eyes I turned from me by offending their God? Can I contemplate the light, and not bewail my blindness? Can I observe the regular movements of the stars, and the obedience of all creatures to their Creator's laws, and not weep for my disorders and transgressions? Can I cast my eyes on the earth, and not weep to see what I have defiled, and drawn down God's curses upon my sins? The world puts me in mind how I have abused it. In everything I see what I have perverted, or what I ought to renounce in penance and am unworthy of. The royal prophet invites even dragons, reptiles, and scorpions to praise God: the sinner alone is excluded, as St. Chrysostom observes (Serm. de Ordinat. sua.): "Can I see any creatures and not summon them to the praises of God? Struck at the remembrance of my base unworthiness and exclusion, I sit down in confusion and bitter tears, desiring to join in this great office, but remembering that his praises in the mouth of a sinner are an abomination to him, who says to such: 'Why dost thou repeat my words, and take my testament in thy mouth, so polluted and defiled?'

"So I only dared to do it at a distance, and below the basest insects, and no other ways than by sentiments of penance, hope in his mercy, and love of goodness, which I am unworthy to name, after having so wretchedly abused it.

"Remembering always my misspent life, I cry out: Such was my life; was this to live, my God? St. Aug. (Conf. 1. 3. c. 2.) It shall be my employ to bewail and make amends for it; I will

draw from all objects salutary rivers of tears and bitter regret. Ah! I have often wept for passions, often for the world: have I no tears for God? Tears are nowhere else so just; nowhere else profitable. Here they are the necessary, the saving tribute of repentance. On all other occasions they are to be checked and moderated; but here they ought to be indulged. Why do I not water with these my bed, chamber, table, garden, and all places wherever I go? Why do I not interrupt by them my sleep, my studies, my labours, and my occupations, and make all creatures witnesses of them? Everything I can see or think of is a bitter reproach of my guilt to my heart. God I have offended; the angels I have grieved; the Church I have scandalized; the devils I have furnished triumphs of malice to; the heavens I have shut against me; hell is the place I have deserved, and its fiends ought in justice to be my horrible company; all creatures ought to raise their voice, and arm themselves against me. Why do not I hide my face in confusion before everything, only crying for mercy?" Thus David lived after his sin, as St. Ambrose elegantly observes.* Apol. c. 19.

10. Penance is likewise necessary, as it is the most indispensable and most powerful preservative against all sin. This virtue alone makes the soul always fearful and watchful, and nourishes a constant hatred and dread of all sin and the occasions of it. Without its continual pruning care, secret passions are easily engendered, and in a short time make great havoc in a heart. Hence, the most innocent are obliged, with St. John the Baptist, to live in the continual practice of this virtue of penance, and we see that the greatest saints, and those whose innocence was the most remarkable, all led most penitential lives. The greater their horror of sin was, the greater was their fear of the least shadow of it in themselves, and their fervour in the use of this most sovereign antidote against it.

11. All men are also bound to lead penitential lives, by an

* "His own fault ever occurs to his mind: whatever might be said or read he applies to himself: whatever he might hear, he imagined himself reproached with his guilt. If he eat, if he think, if he pray, his own fall is always before his eyes: every moment it strikes and afflicts his breast, and never suffers him to be at ease or to forget it."—St. Ambrose, Apol. 1, David, c. 19. "He mourned and wept prostrate on the ground; he fasted; he prayed; publishing his grief to all after ages, he transmitted the testimony of his confession to the latest posterity."—Ib. c. 2.

express positive command of God frequently inculcated by him. Although original sin be entirely remitted by baptism, both as to the guilt and as to the whole punishment due to it; whence this proposition was condemned by Pope Alexander VIII. (No. 19, Anno Dom. 1690): "A man ought to do penance his whole life for original sin;" yet, Almighty God pronounced this sentence on man, in punishment of that disobedience, that he should forfeit the happy state in which he was created in original justice, and should live in conflicts and labour for his trial and exercise of patience. He has therefore imposed a general penance on all the children of Adam, commanding them to labour: "Thou shalt eat thy bread in the sweat of thy brow."—Gen. iii. 19. No man is here excepted. Kings, great ones, the rich, the weak, the poor, sick and healthy, old and young, all are sentenced to apply themselves in a laborious manner. The king, for example, to the government of his dominions, and this by a personal service and attention to it, which is a great slavery; the gentleman to the care of his family and estate; and all to the management of their affairs. If small intervals of necessary relaxation be allowed in all states, nevertheless those, who spend the chief part of their time in superfluous dressing, sloth, circles of pleasures and pastimes, and visits not for motives of duty and charity, or the like, are certainly very far from this spirit and practice of a laborious penance, so necessary to a virtuous life, and so severely enjoined by God to all men. Another part of the general penance laid by God on all men is, that they suffer in patience all the miseries which this life is subjected to in punishment of sin; our banishment from heaven, sicknesses, crosses, the painful struggles against the passions, resistance of temptations, and lastly, death, to which we all stand condemned as criminals before the divine justice; and which we ought daily to accept in spirit, and offer to God in the dispositions of resignation and satisfaction.

12. This virtue of penance is more particularly enjoined us in the holy Scriptures, and especially by Christ in the New Law. We may, in some sense, reduce this to one lesson of penance. All the instructions of the Gospel and prophets, and of all God's ministers in all ages; the exhortations of the prophets; all God's promises, threats, and pressing invitations to men, by their mouths, tend only to call men to this. The great precursor of the world's Redeemer, who came to prepare men to receive him, was only a voice summoning all to repent, or a trumpet sounding this precept in their ears: "Bring forth fruit worthy of penance."—Matt. iii. 8.

His very penitential works, the frightful wilderness in which he spent his days, his austere life and example, announced to the world, in a still more pathetic manner than his words, that he was sent by God only as the great Doctor of penance. Christ himself opened his divine ministry with this same lesson. "Jesus began to preach and to say: Do penance; for the kingdom of God is at hand;" Matt. iv. 17; and all his preachings and instruction during his whole mission are epitomized in this: "Unless you shall do penance, you shall all likewise perish."—Luke, xiii. 3.

The apostles travelled over the world to announce to all men this same precept of penance, together with faith in Christ. They cried out through all kingdoms, towns, and villages, wherever they passed, as the great heralds of heaven: "God now declareth unto men, that all should, everywhere, do penance."—Acts, xvii. 30. Observe how universal the terms are; "all men," without any exception, and wheresoever they lived, whatsoever was their profession, and whatsoever the state of their souls. This same great errand, upon which God sent Jonas to the Ninevites, all his prophets to the Jews, and his apostles to the whole earth, is still what he never ceases to publish by his ministers, who are equally the ambassadors of the Most High God. This same voice, which echoed by the Baptist's trumpet on the banks of the Jordan, and converted so many Jews, daily sounds in our ears from the same authority and summons. Woe to us, if we are deaf to it! Such a hardness of heart will tend to our most grievous punishment far more than it did to the world in the preaching of Noe before the flood, to the Sodomites in the time of Lot, and to the impenitent Jews in the time of Jeremy, and in that of the Baptist.

13. When, then, does this virtue of penance oblige me? During the whole course of my life. By repenting once, I must not think I have done with this exercise. This is a debt I must always continue paying till death. Thus I shall acquit myself of this obligation, and shall deserve to find mercy, when I shall have persevered suing for it to the end of my course. Without this constancy I shall be in danger of forfeiting again the advantages of the grace received in my conversion. They were conferred upon me, on the condition that I should ever remember myself a penitent, and always live in the spirit and practice of this virtue. This the very dispositions of sincere penitence, my own frailty, danger, and daily venial sins oblige me to. This the law of God enjoins me. This is the particular precept of Christ to all his followers. To encourage me to it, he, who was innocence and sanctity itself, did

not disdain to become my model. He was, for my example, and to appease the justice of his Father offended by my sins, during the whole course of his mortality, a God penitent, wholly occupied in expiating my crimes. I am to be a penitent; for to be a follower of Christ, and to be a penitent, is one and the same thing. A Christian is well defined by Tertullian: "One born to penance."*

A particular act of the virtue of penance is of precept: *First*, in the article of death. *Secondly*, when any violent temptation urges, which cannot be overcome without this remedy. *Thirdly*, after one is fallen into mortal sin, so that it be not considerably deferred. *Fourthly*, whenever a person approaches the sacraments of penance, or one, after the age of discretion, that of baptism. It is also a part of the best preparation to all the other sacraments, especially Extreme Unction, and necessary before any of them after mortal sin, or a reasonable doubt of its guilt. *Lastly*, it is of precept, that acts of it be repeated from time to time. All truly serious Christians will be careful to perform an act of it daily in their evening examen; when they assist at the great propitiatory sacrifice of the Mass; when they perform their sacramental penance enjoined them in confession; when they repeat the fifth petition of our Lord's Prayer, the excellent penitential aspirations of the Psalms, or other devotions; under crosses and sufferings, which we ought to accept and offer to God in a spirit of penance. Proper occasions of it occur likewise in almost every action of life.

A delay of repentance after mortal sin for any considerable time, and, above all other crimes, final impenitence, are grievous sins against this virtue, as well as against the charity which a man owes both to God and to his own soul. It is to be expressly confessed, if the sinner made an explicit act of this delay, for how long, and how often he reiterated such an act: also how long the repentance was actually put off.

14. Having considered the necessity of the holy virtue of penance, we are next to admire its efficacy and dignity. To understand which we must reflect how extraordinary a mercy the pardon of any sin is. It is in this sense the greatest of all graces, that it is bestowed on one the most unworthy of all graces; on one who is actually an enemy of God, an object of his holy hatred and abomination, and in a state incapable of performing the least

* Animal ad pœnitentiam natum.

action deserving, I say, so great a favour, but not even the lowest disposition towards it. So immense are the heavy guilt and debt of sin, that all the endeavours of all creatures possible could never satisfy or make a reparation for it; nothing less than the infinite price of the blood and sufferings of a divine God could do it. All sacrifices, prayers, austerities, and sufferings of creatures would be insufficient. "It is impossible that, with the blood of oxen and goats, sins should be taken away."—Heb. x. 4. A God become man died on an ignominious and cruel cross, to procure to holy penance this most wonderful virtue. This was the great fruit of his sacred incarnation and death. All he did and suffered was to expiate and destroy sin, and reconcile sinners to his eternal Father. And holy penance is that virtue, that extraordinary means, which has received from his bloody sacrifice the power of so great and so happy an effect. By penance, exalted by its merits, and containing its infinite propitiation, the sinner is able to restore to God the honour, of which he had robbed him by sin, to repair the injury he had committed against him, to recover his grace, and shut the gates of hell. Can we ever cease one moment extolling the infinite mercy of God, of which this is the rich depository? Why do not all sinners hasten to so powerful and precious a source of salvation?

15. Such is its efficacy, that there can be no sin, of ever so black a dye, though it were to unite in itself the malice of all sins possible to be committed by men and devils, nay, nor any number of such sins, which it is not able to blot out in a moment. Judas, in betraying his divine Master, with the most perfect knowledge, and after having received from him the highest graces and favours, and then closing this crime with despair, committed certainly the greatest of sins; yet had he but cried out once, in his heart, in true repentance, for pardon, the very same instant his crimes would have been all blotted out.

The sacred death of Christ being a superabundant propitiation for all sins, and penance being the instrument of its merits, the power of this virtue must be as extended as is the efficacy of Christ's blood, which is infinite, and a satisfaction infinitely surpassing all sins possible. Nor does fire consume so rapidly a dry thread of flax, as true penance blots out the most enormous and most numerous offences. "If your sins should be as crimson," says Almighty God, "they shall be whitened as snow; and if they are red as the deepest scarlet, they shall be made white as wool."—Isa. i. 18. "If the impious man shall have done penance

from all his sins which he has done, he shall live, and shall not die. I will not remember all his iniquities."—Ezek. xviii. 21, 22. "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Just. And he is the propitiation for our sins."—1 John, ii. 1, 2.

David had fallen into the heinous sins of adultery and a most treacherous murder; he had judged one, who was far from equalling him in his crime, to be "a son of death;" yet he had no sooner spoken, in a true compunction of heart, those few words, "I have sinned to the Lord," than the prophet Nathan, by God's command, and in his name, said to him: "The Lord also has taken away thy sin."—2 Kings, xii. 13. Manasses, after a reign defiled by idolatry, and all manner of crimes and scandals, was carried prisoner to Babylon. There, "repenting and humbling himself greatly before the God of his fathers," he found immediate mercy and relief from the Lord, and was restored also to his temporal kingdom."—2 Par. xxiii. 12, 13. The good thief received faith in Christ, and the extraordinary grace of perfect repentance at his last breath only, and he deserved by it to be the first chosen to accompany Christ to heaven; becoming a standing example of the efficacy of holy penance to all ages to come. Adam and Eve, the first of sinners amongst men, were also the first penitents, being by this plank raised from their sin. Wisdom, x. 1. If they entailed sin upon their posterity, they set also an example of repentance, and showed its efficacy to us, who, notwithstanding their fall, against the Tatianite heretics, with the Fathers and the Roman martyrology, honour them among the saints.

16. Penance not only blots out all sin, but also restores to a soul sanctifying grace, with all its rich attendants. This inestimable treasure was the most precious of God's gifts when bestowed on innocence, as it exalted creatures to a dignity, honour, glory, and advantages incomprehensible and eternal, the very consideration of which fills us with astonishment and veneration. How great and how good is God to frame creatures to such incomprehensible blessings! But if the bestowing of this grace in a state of innocence be so wonderful, how infinitely more so is it in a state of sin? Happy penance does this. It not only cleanses a soul which lay buried in filth, and was an obscene, abominable monster, a fiend of hell, a slave of the devil, but it moreover makes her most beautiful before God, clothes her with his rich and glorious ornaments, invests her with a title to the

kingdom of heaven, makes her a child of God, his spouse and temple, the object of his most holy delight, and the sister and companion of the angels. O glorious change! O astonishing effect of holy penance! The heavens rejoice at it, and the angels sing triumphant praises to God; a day of solemn triumph is celebrated by the whole court of heaven; all creatures, which wept bitterly for this soul's fall, now rejoice exceedingly at her revival. Above all, the Good Shepherd, our merciful Redeemer, who had long sought with the most earnest solicitude and love this lost sheep, and has brought it home on his shoulders, in transports invites all to share in his joy, saying: "Rejoice ye all with me, for I have found again the sheep that was astray." For a sinner converted gives a greater joy, in some sense, than one always just; as a general testifies a more sensible affection for a soldier who had been a coward, but now fights valiantly, than for one who was always courageous, as St. Anselm says, or rather Hervæus, in Matt. xviii. Not but that the just is ordinarily more holy and more agreeable to God; but the conversion of a sinner may be called a most sensible joy, as our Saviour himself calls it a greater joy to heaven than there is over ninety-nine just; nay, so great may be the fervour of repentance, as in a moment to make a sinner an eminent saint, and surpassing the most innocent. To what an extraordinary degree of sanctity and of God's favour did it not raise St. Magdalen? To what extraordinary graces, what spiritual dignities, did not Christ exalt St. Peter after his repentance? These examples show us how perfectly Almighty God forgets the sincere penitent's sins; never reproaches former guilt, nor retains any reserve on its account, any remembrance of it, as he says by his prophet: "And his iniquities shall be no more remembered."—Ezech. xviii.

Another privilege of penance is the revival of all the merits of the good works of the whole life past, which were lost by mortal sin. They were not annulled or destroyed by it, but only impeded to be acceptable to God. The impediment of their acceptance being removed, they recover their former virtue. Of which God says by Joel, ii. 25: "I will restore to you the years which the locust and fly have eaten." Which St. Jerome and the Gloss explain of this revival of lost merits by penance.

## DISCOURSE XXVII.

### ON INTERIOR PENANCE.

1. Penance consists of two parts, as has been said; but the interior, or contrition of the heart, is its essence and its soul. This appears from the very name and nature of repentance, as well as from God's word and the unanimous sense of all men. According to the etymology of the name, a conversion signifies an entire change, by which a thing ceases to be what it was, and becomes what it was not before. So that the conversion of a sinner is a total transformation or reformation of his heart, which makes such a change in his soul that the Scripture calls him a new man and a new creature. God destroys his old heart, and gives him a new one. "I will take from you a heart of stone, and give you a heart of flesh."—Ezech. xxvi. 38. That is, a heart filled with sentiments of compunction, and with new thoughts, affections, desires, and pursuits quite contrary to the former. There is a great deal of difference between changing the place of one's body and changing one's heart. A man changes the place of his body when he goes into another country; but he changes his heart who changes the affections of it. If he loves other things, and hates sovereignly what he loved before, his heart is no more what it was. St. Ambrose (l. 2. de Pœnit. p. 477, ed. Ben.) illustrates this by the example of a certain young man, who, forsaking his lewd life, travels abroad. On his being returned home and meeting his old concubine, she, surprised to see him take no notice of her, said: Do you not know me? I am such a one; to which he answered: But I am no more such a one; for I am become another man. The heart of sin must be destroyed, and the heart of grace substituted in its room.

2. The modish converts of these days flatter themselves that they are true penitents, because of some change in their exterior, and in appearance; but these, whatsoever they may seem in the eyes of men, are no better than dissemblers and counterfeits in the sight of God. For penance is essentially, not a mere interruption or simple disgust of sin, or an empty displeasure at it; but a sincere hatred and sorrow, which is only the work of the heart. Whence God says: "Make to yourselves a new heart."—Ezech. xviii. 31. "Rend your hearts and not your garments."—Joel, ii. 13.

What is sin? It is a free choice and preference of the creature to God. This is formed by the will, by the heart: it is a voluntary disorder of its affections. It is then in this same heart that sin is to be destroyed. The heart alone consents to it. "He fornicated in his heart," says our blessed Saviour.—Matt. v. 28. "Out of the heart come forth evil thoughts, murders," &c.—Matt. xv. 19. It is the criminal which is to satisfy; this seat, this author of sin, is to be punished. This same heart, which offended, must undo its crime, and make the amends. It must offer itself the victim.

The flesh is chastised by fasting; the estate is retrenched by alms; but sin is destroyed only by contrition. God has no regard to other satisfactions and sacrifices without this. The Jews pretended to be converted, when they fasted and humbled themselves as they said; and yet complained that God did not look upon them. He told them by his prophet, that, notwithstanding this outward appearance, they were far from being converted, because the change did not reach their hearts, in which they still cherished their own wills and criminal affections. Isa. lviii. 3. In like manner, many Christians fancy themselves converted, if they fast, give alms, pray, confess their sins, and perform the penance enjoined them; whereas they see not that their hearts remain the same as ever.

But God is not to be deceived by hypocrisy and show. Why, then, do we deceive ourselves, as if he regarded the outward appearance? Though we give all our substance to the poor, and kill our bodies with fasting, this will never appease God, if our hearts are not converted to him by charity, as the apostle assures us. Whatever exterior practices we perform, with whatever diligence we confess our sins, if our heart has not yet done its part, we can never enter the list of true penitents.

3. How many do we see, when they approach the sacrament of penance, extremely scrupulous in their examens, and nice in their confessions; yet not equally solicitous to bring a true contrition? Hence true penitents are so rare. This made St. Ambrose say (l. 2. de Pœnit. c. 10): "I have more easily found him who shall have preserved his innocence unspotted, than he who, after a fall, shall have done worthy penance." This he said in an age abounding with illustrious patterns of penance, as the same saint witnesses. It is the want of a sincere contrition that fills the church with false penitents, and hell with souls. If striking the breast, or confessing, was sufficient for pardon, few

Christians would be lost; but contrition and a change of heart are what constitute a true penitent. This alone can never fail, and will supply all deficiencies in the other conditions, even confession and satisfaction, if the opportunity of them be wanting; but it can be supplied by nothing. Without it all the austerities and prayers that may be practised can never prevail: without it all jubilees and indulgences are fruitless, and absolutions and sacraments only crying sacrileges. From its defect proceeds the great wreck of Christian souls; for as few escape by a plank in a shipwreck, so few save themselves, after sin, by sincere penance or hearty contrition.

4. "Contrition is a sorrow of mind, and a detestation of sin committed, with a resolution of sinning no more." It contains three acts, which yet may be comprised in one word, in which the heart grieves for sin committed, with a detestation of it and of all sin, and a firm purpose of avoiding it for the time to come, with all its immediate occasions. The first part of it is a true sorrow of the heart, consequently not consisting merely in tears, which are often found to lie, as St. Bernard says; not in looks; not in a simple disgust of sin or displeasure at it. The second part is a detestation, that is, an abhorrence and abomination of all sin. This differs from a bare sorrow; for the damned grieve for sin without a detestation of it; and those who have never sinned, as the blessed Virgin, have an abhorrence of it, without a sorrow for having committed it: as also the blessed in heaven have, whose happy state makes them incapable of any grief. The definition adds: this sorrow is to be for sin; *i. e.*, because it is an offence of God; consequently conceived through the love of him.

5. A third act implied in contrition is, a firm purpose of never more offending God by any mortal sin, or voluntary immediate occasion. When the sorrow for sin is named in repentance, this purpose of amendment for the future is generally added; as Isa. i. 16: "Cease to do ill, and learn to do well." And this act is added in the definition of penance by the General Councils, Fathers, and schoolmen, with St. Thomas. Whence many are of opinion, that, in an act of contrition, preparatory to the sacrament, it is essential that this purpose for the future be made explicitly: and all agree, that this is absolutely to be done in practice, lest the sacrament should be null without it. The sorrow for the past regards only sins actually committed; but this purpose for the future must be a general one of avoiding all mortal sin and all

immediate occasions; and it must be expressly extended to all habitual sins and their occasions, as it is a necessary means for the avoiding of them. It is not sufficient if it be only light, wavering, and inconstant: it must be firm, and, as to more dangerous sins, must be extended to a consideration of the necessary and proper means of avoiding them; such as prayer for that end, mortification, or other remedies, more or less in particular, according as the penitent's circumstances may require. Without this care, it is impossible that a person's resolution can be thoroughly sincere and made in earnest. Can one seriously fear a grievous evil, of which he is in great danger, who neglects to provide the means to secure himself? The penitent must not content himself here with general resolutions, which seldom have any effect, being forgotten in the occasions. He must then descend into a detail of the proper means, at least as to certain chief points; and this with so much care, that he may be stronger against the like dangers for the future, than if he had never received any wound: as a bone, which has been put out of joint, will be set by a careful surgeon, so as to be made even stronger than the rest. He is not, indeed, to imagine himself more secure by his resolutions. Such a presumption would expose him to certain ruin. It is chiefly by being more fearful, diffident in himself, and solicitous in putting his resolutions in execution with great fidelity, that he will become thus stronger. "I have sworn and decreed to keep the judgments of thy justice." —Ps. cxviii.

6. This resolution must be formed with a liberal and great heart; for the penitent will receive the graces of support in proportion to its fervour. For this he must make an entire offering of himself to God, to do and suffer all things in his cause, rather than to ever again offend him. He must, in the greatest dispositions of soul possible to raise himself to, cry out with St. Paul in his conversion, without any exception or reserve of himself: "Lord, what wouldst thou have me to do?"—Acts, ix. 6. That is to say, Command, O Lord! what thou pleasest. Must I separate from friends, country, and estate? My heart is ready, if thy will command it. Must I endure hunger, cold, fatigues, poverty, persecutions, chains, stripes, and death? My heart is ready. The sequel of that apostle's whole life demonstrates how sincere and how effectual this offering of himself was. Oh! had he many imitators of the fervour of his resolution, what happy penitents should we behold! How earnest, by penitential lives,

to satisfy the divine justice! How solicitous in the practice of all means that can be expedient to secure themselves from relapses! How fervent to advance in virtue, and how laborious to propagate God's kingdom and promote his honour! Alas! Christians often imagine their resolutions the best in the world whilst they find their hearts warmed with any good sentiments; yet these soon vanish like smoke, and the pretended penitents return to the vomit. Could such purposes have been perfect which so easily are forgotten? Can they, who refuse to make use of the means, be thought to desire the ends those means are ordained for? Or, could they practise those means, and not be strengthened by them? They indeed do not always maintain a man to the end, and may be impaired by degrees in those who fall from their fervour; nay, some fear of a fall by a man's own frailty is not absolutely incompatible with a sincere purpose of never relapsing; but every sudden resolution, every good spirit is not to be looked upon as perfect, or sufficient for a sincere conversion, especially of great sinners. In many it is false, like that of Jeroboam, who acknowledged his crime, but after this did not return from his wicked way. 3 Kings.

In ordinary confessions of venial sins this resolution must be expressly made, viz., of avoiding all mortal sin whatsoever. It ought likewise to comprehend that of avoiding any direct consent to a venial sin, and of watching with the greatest diligence against all venial sins, even of surprise, as St. Thomas admonishes, 3 p. q. 87, a. 1, ad. 1.

7. The essential conditions of contrition are these four: that it be interior, supernatural, sovereign, and universal. It must be first *interior*, and moved by the repentance of the heart: "Thou shalt return to the Lord in thy whole heart; he will have mercy on thee."—Deut. xxx. 1. "You shall seek me, and shall find me when you shall seek me in your whole heart."—Jer. xxix. 13. "Thou shalt have mercy as thou shalt see his heart, because thou alone knowest the heart of all the sons of men."—2 Kings, viii. 38.

A second condition is, that it be *supernatural*. A natural attrition, or a sorrow for sin conceived through temporal or natural motives, or without the motion of grace, noways belongs to the virtue of penance. See St. Aug. in Ps. 77, n. 20, t. 4, p. 828. A disposition to grace and glory, as penance is in a most noble manner, must bear a proportion with its end, and be in the same order. Contrition must, therefore, be excited by motives pro-

pounded by faith, and must be elicited by a motion of divine grace. "No man can come to me unless my Father draw him."—John, vi. 44. "The Lord will give bounty, and our earth shall give its fruit."—Ps. lxxxiv. 13. The bounty of his grace must visit our dry heart before it can produce its fruit.

8. A third condition of contrition is, that it be *sovereign*, or above all things. As God is the sovereign good, and to be loved with a love of preference above all things, so sin, his contrary, and the sovereign evil, is to be detested and hated above all things. God alone is able to abhor this monster, as it deserves; and, as God, he pursues it with all the hatred of a God, with an infinite hatred. We are bound to detest and grieve for it in our souls above all other evils possible, so as to be truly so disposed as to be willing rather, were the case to happen, to undergo all manner of losses, tortures, and evils, than ever to consent to any mortal sin. "Thou shalt find him, if thou shalt seek him with thy whole heart, and with all the tribulation of thy soul."—Deut. iv. 29. "Who will separate us from the charity of Christ?" &c.—Rom. viii. 35.

It is not necessary that this sorrow for sin be the most sensible; for sensible objects more easily affect the sensitive part of the soul than those which are spiritual, though she prefer the latter. We are to distinguish the motion of the will from that of the sensitive appetite. A mother may be more sensibly afflicted at the loss of a babe than at that of a son already grown up, though she would prefer the latter's life. Such, indeed, is the sympathy between the two faculties of the mind, that the movements of the will usually affect, at least in some degree, the sensitive faculty also, though this is not always so. Nor is a penitent, on that account alone, to be discouraged as if he wanted contrition, though he ought to make use of it as a means to humble himself, and redouble his fervour.

9. An imperfect sorrow for sin is called "attrition;" that which is more perfect, "contrition." The contrition of a hard thing, as of a stone, signifies the entire breaking and shattering of it into dust; "attrition," only the outward bruising of it. These words are applied metaphorically to the heart broken by perfect or imperfect repentance.

Attrition may be taken for any imperfect degree of penance. Its most common acceptation with writers of our present age is to signify a supernatural sorrow for sin, on the motives of a fear of hell, of the baseness of sin, or the loss of heaven. To fear hell

more than sin, so as to be disposed rather to sin than fall into hell (were the case possible), is a grievous sin, though it is hard to say a fear is such, unless the comparison be expressly made in the will. But to hate sin for the fear of hell absolutely, is good and profitable. Certainly it is conformable to reason and virtue to fear extreme torments; and it is a wholesome effect of this fear to make a soul detest sin as the cause of such torments. Nor does such an act of detestation of sin anyways imply a design of sinning, if there were no hell. Whence, such a fear of sin is good, a gift of God, and an impulse of the Holy Ghost, as the Council of Trent declares, Sess. 14, c. 4, against Luther; and Clement XI., against Quesnel. God threatens sinners with his punishments, only to inspire them with this wholesome fear, as he expressly declares, Exod. xx. 20, and in many other places. And such a fear is ascribed frequently in Holy Writ to his grace, and prayed for by the saints. This attrition, therefore, is the commencement of true repentance, as in the case of the Ninevites; it withdraws the heart from actually cleaving to sin, and disposes it to be moved to a more perfect hatred of sin by the nobler considerations of divine love. Whether it be possible, out of this motive, to detest sin with a sovereign hatred and above all things, as some think and many deny, is noways material to justify this article of our faith. It suffices that it is a wholesome, imperfect sorrow for that evil, grounded on good and just motives, and leads most powerfully to more perfect dispositions.

I acknowledge and praise thy infinite goodness and mercy, O Lord! in vouchsafing to break and hem in my stubborn, interested heart with saving fear, at a time when you saw it obstinately insensible to all motives of your most amiable sweetness and infinite love. I embrace this powerful means to begin the great work of converting my heart to you. How many glorious saints, saved by penance, confess, with St. Augustin, that they are indebted to this holy fear for the first motives of their happy and triumphant conversions, and the first graces, which laid the foundation and were the steps to the ladder of perfection, which they afterwards mounted so high, till it united them to their God in bliss! Shall I neglect this first means towards a perfect conversion?

10. There is also an imperfect sorrow for sin, grounded on an inferior love of God, as he is good to us, and the happiness, which we fear to lose, exceedingly great. This is a motive higher than the fear of hell, but still the characteristic of a mercenary, not that of a son, nor reaching to the dignity of pure disinterested love of

God for his own sake. It indeed disposes a soul to be easily kindled by its chaste flames. For, by considering God's unspeakable goodness to her, and the bliss of his possession, and indulging her affections in the love of that mercy and happiness, and in grieving for having basely slighted and forfeited it, she will begin also to be inflamed with the love of his incomparable goodness in himself. Some great philosophers and divines* have thought, that the affections of these different motives of love are inseparable in practice, and that it is impossible to love God truly as good to us, without also loving him as good in himself, and purely for his own sake. Though the general opinion holds this pure love of God, if in a degree above all things (and under that degree it cannot be styled a love of God), to be really separable from the act of loving him as our good, yet all must agree this easily leads to that, and disposes a soul to that perfect disposition of true charity.

Perfect penance is only that, which is grounded upon this pure motive of the perfect love of God above all things. This, in a fervent degree, certainly justifies a sinner on the spot, and before he receives the sacrament of penance in the New Law, as it did before the law of grace; witness David, and innumerable other Scripture penitents. "Much is forgiven her, because she loved much."—Luke, vii. 47. "Every one who loves is born of God."—1 John, iv. 7. "Do this, and thou shalt live."—Luke, x. 27. Whence St. Augustin says (Tr. 5. in Ep. Joan. n. 7, t. 3, par. p. 2, 860), "Love alone distinguishes the sons of God and the sons of the devil." There he speaks not of habitual charity, but of any simple act; for he alleges the act of love in St. Peter, saying, "I love thee."—John, xxi. And St. Chrysostom speaks thus (Hom. 7. in 2 Tim. t. 12, p. 703): "As fire entering a wood cleanses all before it, so the fervour of love, wheresoever it shall fall, takes away all evils: where charity is present, all sins are immediately blotted out." How earnest ought I to be in employing all means to obtain of God's mercy this extraordinary treasure of a perfect contrition for my sins!

11. The chief means to obtain the grace of a true contrition are persevering and earnest prayer, holy meditation, and the exercise of good works for this end. Firstly, it must be fervently asked of God, as it is the free gift only of his mercy, a work entirely surpassing our endeavours, and totally supernatural. God inviting

* Bossuet.

us to repent offers his grace to us, but will have us to ask it of him with an earnestness and perseverance suitable to the importance and dignity of the gift. We sin, indeed, of ourselves, but cannot repent of ourselves. "Thy perdition is from thyself; thy relief only in me," says God.—Osc. xiii. 9. It is to him, then, we are to address ourselves; it is only by his grace that we have even a voice left us in our frightful miseries to cry out to him for his great mercy. Finding my soul deprived of the unction of holy compunction, I must imitate Caleb's daughter, who, having received from her father a barren land for her portion, representing this to him, obtained one doubly watered above and below. Judges, i. 15. In like manner must my soul represent her barrenness to God. She will not fail, by persevering in fervent prayer, to obtain from him the double spirit of penance, which will make her fertile in all heavenly fruits. Repeating often, in the deepest sense of her necessities: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me," she will, at length, in the midst of her prayer, find herself stirred up to a spirit of compunction, and a thrice happy change of heart.

12. The second means is, that the sinner, after prayer, penetrate himself perfectly with the proper motives of fear and love, &c., by seriously meditating on them with fervent affections and ejaculations. Souls which live in habitual grace, and in the holy fear of God, easily stir up acts of compunction, by proposing to themselves proper motives only of love. But for general confessions, and at all times in habitual sinners, much greater and longer endeavours are required. Such persons ought first, for some time, and that not inconsiderable, at intervals, meditate upon the last things, the enormity of sin, and other such motives; and, during the rest of the day, repeat frequently to themselves the most moving aspirations of their meditations. By repeating the blows, the viper in the heart will at last be killed. After the motives of fear, or rather at different pauses during the same time, let them consider Christ bleeding for their sins. No motive is more powerful to stir up the soul to compunction than this. "No heart can be so hard as not to be softened by the meditation of Christ's passion," says Gerson from St. Bernard. Let them also consider the benefits of God, his greatness, goodness, and other perfections, with all the motives of his holy love. Proper meditations may be chosen on all these subjects for a general confession. Or some of these motives may be seriously ruminated, as summed up in the "Garden of the Soul," Gother; Lewis of Granada's

"Memorial," vol. i.; Gobinet's "Instructions for Youth," vol. ii. &c. The acts must be reiterated often, that the heart may be worked at last into a perfect change. One stroke of the axe does not fell a great tree, especially if it be deeply rooted in the ground. It is a most necessary caution to all penitents, that they remember it is not enough to conceive fine thoughts, or to read over the best motives or acts of contrition in books. Contrition consists in the affections, or in the heart, not in barren thoughts, which books suggest, and which are merely means, by which the heart is to be moved and entirely broken. They must then be attentively pondered, and the sentiments which they inspire will be as so many nails driven into the heart.

13. A third means to obtain contrition is, the exercise of works of penance offered up for that end, such as humiliation, alms, fasts, and other mortifications. This was eminently the practice of the ancient holy penitents, before they promised themselves so great a mercy from God's grace, as a true repentance after a grievous fall. According to the more ordinary dispensations of his providence, compunction is not to be found in the houses of pleasure, or amidst jollities and diversions. It is the offspring of an afflicted heart, ruminating its sins in the bitterness of its soul, and in a horror of delights. "Compunction alone makes a soul abhor purple, desire haircloth, love tears, fly laughter. As it is impossible that fire should be kindled in water, so is it impossible that compunction should live or be bred in delights. It is the mother of tears, these of laughter; it straitens the heart, they dissolve it;" as St. Chrysostom writes, l. de Compunct. t. l. Sir Thomas More, b. 2, "Of Comfort," c. 7, gives this excellent advice: "If a man cannot weep for his sins as he would, let him desire it." And according to the advice of Gerson: "The less affliction he feeleth in the soul, the more pain in recompence let him put upon his body, and purge the spirit by the affliction of the flesh. He that doeth so shall find his hard heart relent into tears, and into a wholesome heaviness, and a heavenly gladness too, if he joins faithful prayer."

A small alms given in this spirit, and for this end, many have experienced to be of wonderful efficacy. Such a liberality to Christ, in his poor members, moves his bounty to a munificent return of mercy and grace. A very holy author gives the following example:* "I knew," says he, "a sinner, who desiring to

* F. Tho. of Jesus, Suffr. c. 19, t. l, p. 435.

be converted, and not being able to weep as he wished, went out of his house one day, oppressed with sorrow, not knowing whither to go to seek some comfort. He found at his door a poor man, whose misery seemed to him extreme. He was moved, and remembering that our Lord said, whatever was done to them was done to him, returned into his house with the poor man, threw himself at his feet, and in this humble posture said in his heart to Jesus Christ: 'Lord, who art here present in this poor beggar, could I give you my heart? but it is too hard; I dare not offer it to you, nor would you accept of it; receive, however, this loaf, which I give you, and change my heart.' This act of humility and charity was so efficacious, that he found suddenly his heart rent with the most tender sorrow, and his eyes bathed in tears. God afterwards bestowed on him many signal graces."

As the affliction of the heart by contrition must bear a proportion with the sins, so the endeavours to obtain it must be proportioned to this.

*Various Methods of forming Acts of Contrition.*

1. Imagine yourself at the very gates of hell or purgatory, as if just ready to fall into that abyss: here contemplate those horrible dungeons, frightful lakes of fire, various tortures, and hellish monsters and devils. Reflect that you deserved a place in that pit long ago, and that God's justice is, perhaps, now wearied with long forbearance, just ready to precipitate you into it. With all the earnestness of your soul, cry out long to him to have patience a little longer with you, and for the undeserved grace to bewail your offences and disarm his justice. Consider the damned souls, and what they suffer. See many there, who were cut off immediately after their sin; many lost for one only sin; many snatched away, younger, stronger, richer, more likely to have lived longer and done penance than you are. Why are you distinguished from them by so singular a mercy? Tremble, and let this fear sink deep into your heart. Seek to recover grace by tears. Consider its uncertainty, and how easily you might have already been snatched away in sin, only God's goodness withheld your destruction. Admire and praise, in this point, God's unspeakable mercy to you; detest your base ingratitude and insensibility; now love, and resolve ever faithfully to serve so gracious a God. Consider how terrible it is to behold the punishment of others, while you feel a consciousness

of your own guilt. What criminal could see the execution of the accomplices of his treason, whilst his own guilt was equally known to the judge, and not be seized with dread?

2. Prostrate before a crucifix, humbling yourself, as much as possible, in the posture of your body, and far more in spirit, and covered with confusion under the ignominy of your guilt, consider that he, who suffered on the cross, was the eternal God, Lord and Creator of all things; that he underwent it all for you, a base worm of the earth, then in a state of sin and his enemy. Yet such was his goodness and his love for you, that, to rescue you from everlasting flames, he took upon himself your crimes, and made himself the victim for you, to satisfy his Father's justice. Run over distinctly in mind all he endured, from the garden to his last breath on the cross. At each torment, contumely, and insult upon this spotless Lamb of God, reproach yourself as the real author of it, and turn your indignation and grief against your criminal heart. Penetrate in spirit into his divine soul, and consider its most bitter anguish on the cross, crying out that his Father had abandoned him without comfort, and in the garden venting itself by a bloody sweat gushing forth through every pore of his sacred body. Those streams of blood, those tears he shed, that inward extraordinary sorrow of his soul, were all to lament for your sins. Can you see a God so grieve for them, and not weep for them yourself, and mingle your sorrow with his? Remember with what love, under all his pains, he thought continually of you, and pleaded your cause with his Father, and earnestly desired your salvation, as the fruit and recompense of all his sufferings. Dwell upon this spectacle, and the consideration of all his love, till it has softened your heart into the most feeling contrition. Weep over, and salute each wound apart, repeating that your sins caused it. With Magdalen, wash them with your tears. Address yourself in these aspirations to your Redeemer: "O loving Saviour of my soul! your wounds, your blood, your anguish, your death and infinite merits are, by your goodness, made over to me; you offered them all to your eternal Father for my pardon and salvation. Present them to him to obtain for me, from his mercy, the grace of a perfect contrition. He can never be deaf to such a voice, nor defer for one moment the infinite favour. I am the most base and undeserving of creatures; but your interposition will still procure me this great grace. You still retain the same bowels and love for me, which you had on Mount Calvary: 'you live always to intercede for

us.'—Heb. vii. 25. Refuse me not, then, this fruit of your bitter sufferings. I desire to grieve for my sins with you, and upon the same most pure motive for which you so bitterly bewailed them. I unite my contrition with your most holy sorrow. You grieved for my sins as they deserve, because you knew their malice and enormity. May your perfect sorrow supply all the imperfection and defect of mine."

Address yourself also to the Father, begging that he turn his face from your sins, and look on the face of his Christ, that the sight of the wounds and bleeding sacrifice of his ever well-beloved Son move him to pardon your past ingratitude. Conjure him, with all possible earnestness, by the same Redeemer, in whose name he has engaged himself never to reject any request that should be presented to him, never to suffer you to offend him more, and to accept the sacrifice of a contrite heart, which you offer him for your past offences, and with it, to make it acceptable, and to supply its infinite deficiency, the sorrow and sufferings of his Son, an infinite and superabundant satisfaction for all sin.

In considering each of the other motives of contrition, when the soul is worked into the greatest sense, horror, and grief of her sin, let her then never fail to have recourse to the passion of Christ to excite her confidence and hope, and to offer it to God in reparation.

3. In the deepest humiliation of soul weigh seriously the enormity of mortal (or venial) sin, upon the articles of those meditations above; reflect that it is the sovereign evil, object of the infinite and eternal hatred of a God, the parent of hell and of all that is monstrous in the devils, and the cause of all the miseries in the universe. Run over the dreadful havoc it has made in your soul, and weep over it. St. Ambrose writes thus to a virgin fallen into sin (t. 5, 621): "I will weeping employ the lamentations of the Prophet, and invite all to join their tears with mine. Hear only the cause of my grief, and you will judge whether my sorrow is not just. Where shall I begin? What shall I say first, and what last? Shall I mention what thou hast lost, or what thou hast found? Thou wast a virgin in the paradise of God, amongst the flowers of the Church. Thou wast the spouse of Christ. Thou wast the temple of God, and the dwelling of the Holy Ghost. When I say thou wast, so often must thou weep that thou art not now what thou wast. Thou didst shine as silver and sparkle as gold. Thou wast a bright star in the hand of God.

What sudden change! What dismal catastrophe! Thou art now made the corruption of Satan, an execrable harlot, a sink of uncleanness, a filthy sty of the devil. Thy star is fallen from heaven, extinct and changed into a black coal; doubly woe to thee who hast forfeited such high things for a moment's pleasure. How will the Holy Ghost again visit thee? He flies from all that is impure. What saint can approach thee for horror? Thou darest not open thy eyes to look up to any of them. When I come to mention thy crime, my mind is filled with horror, my heart fails, and my spirits faint away. A surgeon laying open a putrid ulcer, let him be ever so stout, must feel his heart grow faint under the operation when he comes to the bottom."

St. Chrysostom wished he could have sent a letter filled with tears to his old friend Theodore, fallen from the service of God, and repeated over him the lamentations of Jeremy, with tears much more just, as he says, for the ruin of his soul, than those were which that prophet had shed over the material city of Jerusalem. (T. 1. 15, 35.) A mother weeps over an only dear child snatched from her by temporal death, and shall I have no tears to bewail the much more terrible death of my only one, my immortal soul, where alone tears can be profitable? For they have the miraculous power of raising me again to my spiritual life.

4. Consider the infinite majesty, goodness, and benefits of him whom you have offended. Blossius sums up the principal nearly as follows: each sentence is to be attentively and effectually repeated in the heart.

My God is the King of all ages, and the Lord of supreme majesty, riches, nobility, and excellence; most high, omnipotent, and eternal. He created the wide heavens, the earth, and all other things, visible and invisible, out of nothing, by the sole word of his will, and preserves them every moment from sinking again into nothing, and governs, directs, and moves them in all their parts without labour. He dwells in inaccessible light, whither no man can approach, yet he is all everywhere, and invisibly fills the whole visible world, and all its parts, and every place. He sees all things most clearly, and penetrates through and through the most secret thoughts and affections of men's hearts. He knows most perfectly all things, past, present, and to come. His greatness, wisdom, dignity, and glory have no bounds or end. He is infinitely holy, infinitely beautiful, infinitely sweet, infinitely pious, merciful, good, and infinite in all

manner of perfections. He is infinitely worthy of all praise, love, and adoration from all creatures, and infinitely surpasses all. He is blessed, and super-exalted, and glorious for all ages. No creatures can comprehend the least of his attributes; all are lost in the contemplation of his boundless power, wisdom, love, delights, and every other perfection; for, though we give to them the utmost extent which our imagination can reach to, and multiply them ever so often, we shall still be infinitely short. But what am I? A base worm of the earth, dust and ashes, poor, weak, and miserable, to whom it is a great benefit to be suffered to crawl upon my fellow-dust. I am of myself nothing but weakness, impotency, and sin, and from myself, or by my own strength, am capable of nothing, and able to do nothing but sin. Moreover, born in sin, a child of wrath, and an enemy of God, I came into this world unworthy to breathe the air, to behold the light, to be borne upon the earth, or to enjoy the service of any creatures, being a just object of universal and eternal horror, contempt, enmity, and punishment.

My God has been, from all eternity, the most faithful, most constant, and disinterested lover of me, his ungrateful creature. He loved me before I was, and saw me in the abyss of nothing, in which I lay buried. Out of pure, gratuitous love and goodness for me from eternity, he ever thought on me with infinite complacency, affection, and tenderness; entertained the greatest designs of mercy in my favour; and decreed to draw me out of my nothing, and give me this noble being, which he graciously bestowed on me in time, making me a rational creature, capable of loving, praising, and enjoying him, stamping on my immortal soul his own most glorious image. And, O stupendous! O affectionate, and to be ever affectionately remembered mercy! when I by sin was become his enemy, and lay under the guilt and sentence of eternal damnation, this high God, though he had shown no pity on the rebel angels, was yet penetrated with an inconceivable love of me, which stopped, nay, overcame and disarmed his justice. He, quite vanquished by his mercy and compassion, took upon himself my nature, and, becoming man, my God was made my brother in flesh. Lest I should remain disinherited from his kingdom of glory, and perish everlastingly, labouring above thirty years for me, he wrought my salvation. For my sake he poured forth his most precious blood to the last drop, and most cheerfully and with joy underwent contumelies, injuries, the utmost contempt, horrible torments, and an igno-

minious death. Thus did this amiable God redeem me, and recover for me that title to happiness, which, by my crimes, I had justly forfeited. Oh! what did he see in me to set such a value on me? I could have nothing in me which he could stand in need of, as he is infinite in all riches in himself, and no creature has any good thing, or any perfection, but what is from him, and his gratuitous gift. What, then, could he see in me, who was only filth and sin? Oh, how did he love me, so base and vile a creature, to do so much for me!

These benefits are common to me and other men; but, not less on that account granted to me: and there are others, in which God was pleased to distinguish me in particular. How did my God choose me before others, noways more base or undeserving, and call me to his heavenly kingdom, by so many graces, and, notwithstanding my malice, ceases not still to invite, and even, as it were, to compel, spur on, entice, encourage, terrify, and on every side besiege me with his graces! He has kept me out of so many infidel and barbarous nations, to be born in his holy faith; out of so many countries and families, led away by heresy and schism, to be nourished in the bosom of his true Church; out of the society of so many who are brought up in ignorance, to be taught his holy law; so that I am inexcusable above others, in not having kept his commandments. He washed me from the stain of original sin by the holy laver of baptism, and from the commencement of my infancy received me to be his adopted son and co-heir with Christ, his co-eternal and consubstantial Son. From my very birth he has always to this moment preserved, protected, and guarded me; and, even then, when my wicked will ran away from him, he did not abandon me; but, whilst I was offending him, and justly deserved to be plunged into hell for my crimes, he supported me, and gave me that breath and life, that faculty of acting, and that very movement of my body, which I most perversely abused to insult him. Moreover, dissembling so great an injury from so base a worm, he laboured, by his inspirations, to overcome my malice, and draw me to himself; nor, when I, by an unheard of wickedness, stopped my ears against his voice, and continued more boldly in sin upon the encouragement of his patience and mercy, making his goodness a motive and incitement to fly in his face, did he immediately punish my insolence and so great injuries; but, giving me time to do penance, still invites me to him. He also instituted the saving sacrament of penance, that, if my soul should fall again

and suffer shipwreck after baptism, it might have a plank yet remaining to be saved by, that I might not perish. Without this great and wonderful mercy, Oh! where would my wretched soul have now been? I cannot think of it without horror and dread. Even now her dwelling had been in the bottomless pit, in the midst of boiling furnaces of raging flames, under the most frightful torments, in everlasting darkness, endless death, and inexpressible and never-ceasing anguish, with hellish scorpions and devils. But my God and true Saviour has rescued me from all this by repeated wonderful deliverances, and by means of infinite mercy, which I can never be sufficiently astonished to consider.

Nor did he here set bounds to his benefits and mercies. All this was not sufficient to satisfy the excess of his love and bounty; but he also composed a love-potion, in which he would give me all that an Almighty God could bestow; for, by his omnipotent wisdom he designed, and by his omnipotent power he instituted the sacrament of the blessed Eucharist, in which, under the veils of my ordinary food, he gave me his precious flesh and blood, with his soul and divinity, to incorporate himself with me, remain in me, and to make me remain always in him, and be one with him. O wonderful institution! O thrice happy, thrice glorious union of love! whereby my God, not only spiritually, but also by the closest conjunction of substances, dwells in my breast, inflames and strengthens me with his divine presence, enriches me with the effusion of all his heavenly graces, and vouchsafes to be himself my comfort and protector, lest I faint in the way. He instituted, also, the other sacraments, by which, as by so many channels, he might bestow his graces upon me, adapted to my wants and necessities.

Yet, I have always been insensible and ungrateful, repaying him with evil for so much and such continual good. When he had redeemed me from hell, and cleansed me from sin, I again enslaved myself to the devil, and subjected myself under his yoke, not forced to this, but choosing, by my own free will, to serve him rather than be faithful to my God, who had most mercifully broken my chains, not once, but many times. O truly, the more benefits he has heaped upon me, the more grievous sins have I most ungratefully repaid him with in return! He, when I was in open rebellion against him, bore me in my heinous sins, all that time employing many ways to recall me from perdition; and, when he had overcome my obstinacy, and drawn me

back to himself, he received me most graciously, forgave me my innumerable crimes, admitted me again to his favour, truly the good Father to his prodigal son, and endowed me with his treasures; yet I dared still again to revolt from him. O my soul! how canst thou consider this thy baseness, and not be overwhelmed with regret and confusion? Reflect further, that God's patience still waits for thy return, ready again to forget thy relapses, upon thy sincere repentance. Is not my heart ready to burst at the sight of such a goodness, and which I could, nay, have so basely insulted? Every moment of my whole life has been marked with many and great benefits, both spiritual and corporal: how long and how often has he borne with my repeated infidelities and outrages! How mercifully has he forgiven them, whilst many younger, stronger, and less guilty have been abandoned by him, or cut off and buried in hell for lesser offences! How are they in their flames at this moment, the most moving and most sensible proof of God's most distinguishing mercy to me, the most undeserving and unworthy of all creatures! the remembrance whereof melts my stony heart with the deepest sense of my ingratitude. Again, he has ever restrained the raging lion, whose power, malice, and craft were otherwise an overmatch for me, and who sought continually to devour me. How many occasions of sin did he remove; how many temptations and dangers did he prevent, into which I should have otherwise fallen! Under the temptations, into which I fell, how many precious victorious graces did he not bestow upon me! by which he made me triumphant over my enemies, and delivered me out of their very jaws open to have swallowed me up. There is no evil, corporal or spiritual, no sin nor depth of misery that one man can fall into, into which I might not, and should not fall, did not God ever deliver me from it by special succours, either of the order of nature, or of the supernatural order of grace. Whatever cruel tortures, disgraces, racking diseases, miserable deaths, or other corporal calamities; whatever evils of the soul in the most hardened and abandoned sinners I can imagine to myself, either real in any wretches that ever were in this world, or even possible in any, at the very name or thought of which I tremble, and almost sink away, would have been my own lot, had not a single mercy of my God protected me from them. To him I am indebted for all this, and for my deliverance from the pains of hell. When I consider them in detail, and reflect that I ought to have been buried in them for endless

eternity, how do I shudder, how do I bless and praise, with all my powers, and with all my affections, that God, whose pure goodness has rescued me from them!

On the other side, I am lost in entering into a detail of the innumerable graces and favours with which he has continually enriched, adorned, purified, strengthened, awakened, terrified, encouraged, and supported me; and the sweet consolations and melting embraces of his love, with which he has often cherished and comforted me. He has ever watched and loved me as the apple of his eye. Every breath I drew, every moment he gave me, every adversity as well as prosperity which he sent me, was the effect of his love, which has never ceased showering fresh benefits upon me, and which were intended for, and have excited me to turn them all to my great good. He forgets nothing that I do, hear, speak, or desire for his honour, and through his love; and suffers not the least good thoughts, which his grace forms in me, to be lost; but reserves all most faithfully within himself to be recompensed with everlasting crowns, notwithstanding the imperfections with which I use them, never perfectly faithful to his grace. He has prepared for me his most glorious and most beautiful kingdom of delights, in which, upon the only and easy condition that I love him (which is otherwise my most indispensable duty and my happiness), he will give himself, with all his infinite perfections and joys, to be my reward, truly exceeding great, beyond all bounds and measure. Though infinitely happy in himself, he will not be happy without me, and without the company of so vile a creature and so base a sinner, if I only consent to love him. He has given me his own holy mother for comfortress and advocate; all the blessed spirits for my patrons and intercessors; and all the saints for examples to imitate, and to walk after in their steps, as they laboured under the same weaknesses and difficulties here on earth, and I enjoy the same succours. He has committed the care of me to a most noble spirit, an angel, one of the high princes of his heavenly court, whom he has appointed to be my faithful guardian in all my steps. He himself watches over me, and ordains all things in the universe, which can directly or indirectly concern me, with as much tenderness, affection, and attention for me, as if I were the only person in the world, burning with the most constant and most ardent desire of my salvation. Ah! no mother loves her only son so tenderly as my high God loves and cherishes me. His love for me is most sweet, most ardent, and truly without bounds. But I, alas! have always

been, and am, ungrateful and unfaithful, rendering evil for good, and many ways destroying and hindering his gifts and graces in me, breaking my most solemn engagements, so often renewed to him, though I should be ashamed to violate my simple word given to a man in a temporal contract, and profaning what God had most solemnly consecrated and sanctified.

Recollect in general, my soul, all the different crimes of which thou hast been guilty, and how often thou hast repeated any of them; run over all the states and organs of thy body, and thou wilt see that all have been abused against thy God and the end of thy creation; behold thyself overrun and all covered with hideous ulcers. Consider the just and tender reproaches thy God will make thee for thy base return for each of his benefits, in particular your creation, conservation, redemption, &c., which no heart can feel without being softened into tears of compunction; as drops of rain often falling, hollow the hardest stone, so repeat these reflections in short pathetic aspirations, till thy adamantine heart be quite pierced and bruised, and these two eyes be made two perpetual sources of tears. Help me, O angels of heaven, and all you glorious saints, inhabitants of paradise! particularly you blessed penitents, and my special patrons! implore this great mercy from the Father of mercies for the most miserable of sinners. O queen of heaven, refuge of sinners, mother of all men redeemed by Christ! obtain by your intercession this grace for me, through the adorable blood of your divine Son spilt for sinners. O God of pity! by the merits of your sacred passion, have pity on my folly, impiety, and ingratitude, the abyss of which you alone penetrate and understand. I am unworthy even to lift up my eyes towards you, or to call for mercy; but, prostrate on the ground, my heart cries to you in its deep groans in silence, not daring to employ my voice, or raise my countenance. May your ears be open to my earnest, inward cry, with which I beg that you mercifully enlighten my understanding, to see and deeply penetrate my heart; sincerely to bewail all my ingratitude: nor will I cease till I can hope, by your grace, that I have obtained this greatest of mercies.

5. The Penitential Psalms contain the most perfect sentiments of penance, with which the Holy Ghost inspired the royal penitent and prophet, to serve as a model for all penitents of succeeding ages, whereby to form in themselves that holy spirit of penance. In the primitive ages the pastors of the Church recited them frequently over penitents during their stage of canonical satisfaction, and enjoined them often to repeat them. St. Augustin, in his

last sickness, caused them to be wrote out and hung by his bedside, and scarcely ceased to recite them, with abundance of tears, to his last breath. St. Ambrose, writing to the fallen virgin (ch. 10), bids her to recite every day the 50th Psalm, and to repeat continually in her heart some moving sentences of penance, drawn from the Psalms and prophets, bewailing herself with perpetual tears and fasting. The Holy Ghost will be the best Master of this spirit of compunction in these holy prayers to those whom he has truly animated with it. But, for a help to the more ignorant, a paraphrase of the Miserere and De Profundis is subjoined, which may be varied, as every one's devotion will easily suggest from this model, both in these and in the other psalms.

*Verse* 1. I lie buried and rotting in the most filthy stench and sink of sin; I am quite overwhelmed with the miseries of my baseness and injustice; yet I have been blind, and have not seen the evils which encompass me. Like the sinner reproached, Apoc. iii. 17, I am miserable, and have not known it. What advantages have I lost! What a glorious state, and what high prerogatives am I fallen from! And into what a frightful abyss of miseries! How innumerable and how dreadful are the evils I groan under in my sins! How horrible are those eternal ones, into which I am just ready to be plunged as the just recompense of my guilt! O most wretched condition to which I am reduced, which no words can express, nor all created understandings together conceive! Only an infinite God, who alone knows his own infinite perfections, can fathom the depths of my wounds or the enormity of treasons committed by a base creature against his adorable Majesty. Angels of heaven, who penetrate, as far as creatures are able to do, the frightful miseries of my soul, be moved to pity at their sight, and weep over them with me. I am still too insensible and blind under them, though I begin to have so much feeling of them as to roar, howl, and tremble under them. Immortal thanks to you, my God, who have opened my eyes, have scattered those clouds which caused my darkness, and have discovered to me my iniquity by a mercy promised, Isa. xlii. 16: "I will lead the blind into a way which they know not: I will put their darkness before them into light." Miserere.

The deep feeling of my extreme miseries makes me most earnestly seek a remedy for them. For this I prostrate myself before your throne, O Lord of infinite majesty! whom I have most basely offended. To whom else could I have recourse but to you? I have sinned against you. My evil is so great, that all creatures could never afford me the least relief: they all could never pro-

tect me, as they are all nothing before you. Moreover, as long as I remain your enemy, they all join you, their Maker, arming themselves against me, a rebel, ready to execute your justice upon me. To you, then, do I fly, who alone are able to relieve me. My condition is every way most miserable, and, without you, desperate; but by an only word you can at once entirely restore me. Therefore, I cast myself at the foot of your throne; but am not able to lift my eyes towards heaven, or to pronounce any of your sacred names, without bursting into a flood of tears. How dare I call you Father, who have renounced your authority? or King, who have withdrawn myself from your sweet obedience, and cast off your holy law? or Judge, the remembrance of which quality overwhelms me with dread and terror? or God, which name includes all your titles and greatness in one, all which I have injured? Nevertheless, you, the best of fathers, still remember that I am the work of your hands; and though I have impiously effaced your divine image, stamped by grace and original justice on me, by which I bore a resemblance with your infinite Majesty, you yet discover the traces of it in my disfigured soul, and love me still, nor yet cease to invite me to mercy.

If I am baseness and unworthiness itself, you are mercy itself; your goodness and pity know no bounds. Where shall I hope for pity so confidently as in the fountain of pity and mercy? I, therefore, prostrate before you, implore your clemency, and conjure you by the bowels of your goodness to have compassion on me. It is your amiable property to have mercy. Misery is the proper object of pity, as guilt is of indignation. Suffer not my heinous crimes to provoke your just anger against me; but rather may my calamities excite your tenderness. What is a more moving object to infinite goodness than extreme distress? Behold the only title on which I sue for pardon; it is not that I have any claim to it on account of anything in me that might deserve it, but only because your goodness is infinite. Can you forget your own nature? To show mercy is your property, your delight, and peculiarly your own work. Can you refuse to exercise it upon me? The abyss of my misery implores the abyss of your mercy. Though my iniquity and evils are extreme, your goodness is still greater, and infinitely surpasses them. Let it, then, be moved with compassion at them, and apply its sovereign remedy to remove and heal them. As you love my soul, you cannot behold its miseries, and not pity me. "Have mercy on me, therefore, O God! according to thy great mercy." They who sin by ignorance or inadvertence; they who have offended in smaller points, stand

in need of your ordinary mercy. I have sinned by malice, and cannot be relieved without your great mercy. The justification of any sinner is a greater work than the creation of the universe. I am a relapsed, perfidious, ungrateful, base, and sacrilegious sinner; and cannot be delivered but by an effect of your highest mercy. I have multiplied sins beyond the number of the hairs of my head; I have offended you by all my members and faculties. I have broken not one, but, by some offence or other, all your holy laws, trespassing in each of all my duties to you, and adding, every day of my life, since I have been capable of sinning, some new transgressions. I therefore beg your compassion according to your great mercy.

*V.* 2. "And according to the multitude of your commiserations." My numberless and complicated crimes cannot be washed away without innumerable mercies. But how often soever I may have offended, you have infinitely more mercies, as they are inexhaustible. You are able to pardon, not only seventy-seven or a thousand times, but as often as any creature can have offended, if he sincerely return to you with a proportioned repentance; for your mercy is not confined by either number or bounds. You are also rich in the multitude of your mercies, which you have shown to innumerable penitent sinners; nor are they by this in the least impaired. You exercised them on all, whoever sincerely implored them. All the saints have been saved only by them. Your clemency does not suffer by the multitude of its acts, but ardently seeks penitent souls to save them. You have mercies reserved for me, and have given me most assured pledges of them; though my sins are most grievous, and without number, my comfort is this multitude of your mercies. I then have recourse to you with confidence, sensible, indeed, of the depth of my wounds, but placing all my hope in your inexhaustible source of goodness, and earnestly conjuring it, by your bowels of compassion, that you blot out my iniquity.

*V.* 3. I am become a loathsome nest of filth and stench, altogether insupportable in your divine eye, and even to myself. Wash me, O Lord! you alone can cleanse my soul. Should I bathe myself every day and night in floods of my tears and blood; should I undergo, in a spirit of penance, all that martyrs, confessors, or holy solitaries have ever gone through for your glory, and have all the angels, saints, and men on earth, associates of my endeavours and labours, I could never wash off the stain of the least venial sin. Your precious blood, O God! is the only bath that can purify me. You alone can make me clean. Cleanse me,

then, O merciful Lord! Behold, I sigh before you, because my wounds are putrefied and filled with stench. "I am afflicted and humbled exceedingly. I roar out from the groaning of my heart. O Lord! all my desire is before thee, and my sighing is not hid from thee. My heart is disturbed within me; my strength has forsaken me, and even the light of my eyes is not with me."—Ps. xxxvii. Why, therefore, O Lord! do you not blot out my iniquity? You have, I hope, washed me already; but not enough, I fear, to remove all the remains of my sin. Wash me again and again; cleanse me entirely. Touch my heart; give me a bath of tears, flowing from the most perfect compunction, equal to the enormity of my sins; let these never cease to wash me more and more by the virtue of your adorable blood.

*V.* 4. I know, confess, condemn, and bewail my guilt. Arise, then, O Lord! according to your holy engagement and law, your promise to penitent sinners, and remit my offences. I was long in darkness; I was blind, and loved my blindness. I was in sin; heaven was incensed against me; you were my enemy; hell was ready to swallow me up; yet I could laugh and sleep, such was my insensibility. But I have now opened my eyes. I see all my misery and heinous guilt. My sin stands always against me, ever stinging my conscience, and cruelly reproaching me.

*V.* 5. I see clearly, and confess, with bitter regret and shame, that by my sin I lifted up my hand against you, though, alas! I did not then consider it: yes, against you, a God who had created me, and who held my life in your hand. O felony! against a God who had redeemed me from hell, and given me the life of grace by dying for me. O ingratitude! against a God who loved me from eternity, and heaped innumerable, inestimable benefits upon me. O baseness! against a God to whom I had vowed fidelity in baptism. O perfidiousness! against a God who that moment could throw me, body and soul, into hell. O insensibility! I sinned against you, my God, whom I ought by all titles to have served, feared, and loved with my whole heart, soul, and strength! O blindness! O sacrilege!

So far did I carry my insolence and malice, as to sin against you in your very presence, and to do evil before those very eyes, which cannot bear to behold any iniquity. For, wherever I went, in whatever caverns I hid myself, I was always in your presence; your eyes always beheld me. And, though I feared the sight of men, I boldly feared not yours; but disobeyed and insulted you to your face.

"I have sinned against you alone," and it is only your offence that I consider and so grievously regret. I have scandalised and injured men; but, even then, I offended you, for whose sake I was bound to love them. And the offence against your infinite Majesty is so enormous that the rest all disappears. For the remedy of this evil what shall I do? To whom shall I fly? Only to you yourself, my God; for who else could heal me? And who is so good, so merciful, so full of compassion? You came from heaven to call sinners; you died to draw them to you; you invite those who are burthened, and engage yourself to ease and relieve them. Behold, I come loaden, weighed down under my sins: remove my heavy burden; overcome my malice by your mercy. Thus will you overcome in fidelity to your promises of mercy to sinners, when your sweet providence shall be considered and judged by men, most true, faithful, and merciful, as it is.

*V.* 6. O tender Samaritan! look on my frightful condition, pity my miseries, and heal my wounds. I was even conceived in original sin, and from it draw concupiscence, weakness, a proneness and inclination to evil; which, unhappily, I have not subdued, but enslaved myself to, and thus plunged my immortal soul into its present abyss of miseries, so much deserving tears.

*V.* 7. Deliver me, because you love truth and cannot violate your divine word. You always most faithfully observed your sacred promises to Noe, Abraham, the other patriarchs, the Jews, sinners, and all men, and are incapable of ever failing in any tittle of them, because you are the lover of truth. As you have promised pardon to all sincere penitents, you could never reject any sinner returning to you; nor can you reject me, if, by your grace, I truly implore your mercy. Touch my heart with a perfect repentance, and then receive me to pardon according to your word; for you are ever faithful to it on your side. But you love truth also in me, *i. e.*, sincere repentance. Give me such a repentance.

"You have revealed to me the hidden mysteries of your wisdom." Have you given me this divine knowledge of your faith and most wonderful redemption by your Son that it should be fruitless in me? No. Your desire is, that I partake of its fruits. The wise men of the world knew not these saving truths: the curious searchers of nature pryed above the heavens, and carried their eyes on every side; but could never find out these

mysteries of your wisdom. Yet you have revealed them to the little ones, and among them to me. But do I know them in vain, or so as not to be saved by them? Thus, they would only aggravate my miseries. Avert such an evil, for your infinite mercy's sake. Your calling me to your faith, and manifesting your saving truths to me, is a pledge of your singular predilection for me. Complete your mercy towards me, and restore me to your favour, by the pardon of my offences.

*V.* 8. Sprinkle me, O Lord! not with hyssop dipped in the blood of goats and oxen, the weak sacrifices of the Old Law, unable to cleanse my sinful soul, but with the blood of your Son, the immaculate Lamb, who offered himself a bleeding victim for me. All the saints have their robes whitened only by this; all were cleansed by this holy flood. I am indeed more defiled; but it is of infinite virtue, and can perfectly cleanse me, though my sins were ever so numerous and enormous. Wash, then, my soul here, and I shall be cleansed and made whiter than snow.

*V.* 9. What a joy will it be to my bruised heart, under my terrors and amidst my fears, to hear that word of sweetness from your divine mouth: "Thy sins are forgiven thee; go in peace. Thy chains are loosed; the heavens are again open to thee!" How will my bones, broken with sorrow, exult and rejoice at that sentence of comfort! But Oh! still more shall I triumph and be overwhelmed with joy at your tribunal, and in everlasting glory! How shall I for ever bless my penance, my grief, my tears, which shall have purified me on earth, and purchased me so immense a glory! How shall I eternally sing in overflowing jubilation of heart: Happy, thrice happy penance, which has shut the gates of hell, and procured me this so great, so perfect a bliss!

*V.* 10. How should I not weep and do penance, by this means to disarm thy justice? I see your infinite indignation kindled against me for my sins. I see your just anger over me as a raging sea swoln, ready to swallow me up; as a high mountain ready to fall on me and crush me; as thunder ready to reduce me to ashes. A mortal dread seizes my heart. Ashes and tears are my food. I roar through the excess of fear and grief, and cry out with a devout penitent soul:* "Lord Jesus Christ, future Judge of the world, I, a guilty criminal, considering the terrors of your tribunal, trembling cry out to you: Lord, reprove me

* Gerson in Ps.; Pœnit. Mod. 1, t. 4, p. 6.

not in your fury, nor chastise me in your wrath. Wo to me! How could I insolently provoke your immense clemency to fury, and your infinite mercy to anger! I have justly deserved your indignation: I confess it trembling. But this fury is not in you and in your affection; but out of you, and in your actions and effects: for you are always the same." In your fury, you are calm within yourself. Your fury is the torments of hell; your anger the pains of purgatory, in which you chastise to save. I pray to be delivered from both. But by what means? Upon what do I rely? Upon what do I build my hopes? Not on my justice or deserts, but purely on your mercy. "Have mercy on me, because I am infirm." I allege no plea but my sickness and wounds, and your omnipotence and clemency. I am sick; you are my physician. Heal me, therefore. Here apply what remedies it shall please you. Here cut; here burn; only deliver me from your fury, from the severity of your justice in the world to come. O compassionate, tender Physician! "heal me; for all my bones are disturbed. I have laboured in my groanings; I will wash my bed every night with my tears."—Ps. vi. In this affliction of spirit, I will never cease to cry out to you with all the earnestness of my broken heart. Turn away your eyes from my sins. I ask not that you turn away your eyes from me: this would be to be abandoned by you. As in the order of nature I subsist only by your eyes being fixed on me, so likewise in the order of grace. But I fear your eyes being fixed on my sins. Blot them out, therefore; for you cannot but see them as long as they remain. I dread your attention to my guilt, and with tears and earnestness reiterate my prayer: blot out my offences with the sponge of your infinite mercy. But I hope for this inestimable grace only by humble, assiduous prayer and works of penance. These shall be my constant study and endeavours.

*V.* 11. My heart is defiled and corrupted; depraved, sick, languishing, and abandoned to the tyranny of its passions and irregular affections and desires. Cleanse and heal it: then make it love you alone, for whom only it was created. My mind is filled with vanity, false ideas of things, a foolish esteem of earthly joys, and a fear of phantoms. Drive away all illusions of my understanding; correct all the errors of my mind, deceived by self-love and the passions, and "create a new right spirit in me."

*V.* 12. "Cast me not from your face." This is the utmost, most dreadful, only misfortune. I shudder and fall away at the

very thought or mention of it. I, indeed, most justly deserve it, as I have abandoned you, and deserted to your enemy's cursed banner. I have crucified my Saviour Jesus Christ, and have my hands, as it were, yet red, stained with his sacred blood. Nothing is more just than that I should be cut off by you. But then I shall be lost and eternally undone. Filled with terror at the thought, and with detestation of my madness, and grief for my baseness, I beg, with all the earnestness of my soul, that you will avert so frightful an evil. You never rejected any one who fled to you. The Cananæan woman, by persevering, at last found mercy. I throw myself at the foot of your throne, and will not cease, with tears and loud cries, to implore your pity, and begging that you rather heap upon me all temporal calamities and sufferings possible, if your justice must absolutely require it; that rather pains and rottenness consume my very bones yet alive; but that you cast me not from you, and that you take not your Holy Spirit away from me. It is yet with me in some degree; for, without it, I could not even now seek you. Grant it to me in its plenitude, and may it dwell and reign in my heart. Deprive me not of its sweet presence: without it I am nothing, and am utterly undone.

*V.* 13. "Restore to me the happiness of your salvation" and of your love, which replenishes the soul with inconceivable joy. The very remembrance of it fills your servants with inexpressible comfort. Your spirit is also a spirit of strength. I am a poor weak reed; but strengthen me by your powerful spirit. By it I shall be invulnerable and triumphant; by it I can do all things: without it I am nothing, and can neither rise nor stand.

*V.* 14. What can I do to thank your mercies? To praise you, eternity is too short. All your blessed will for ever thank and praise you with me and for me. I will labour to make all infidels and sinners know and love you, to propagate your honour and your spiritual kingdom on earth, and to make you reign in the hearts of all men. "Come and hear, and I will tell you what he has done to me."—Ps. lxxiii. 13. I will announce to all the earth the terrors of your justice, and the sweets of your love and mercy. My heart is inflamed with love and gratitude: it burns with a desire, that all men may know, love, and praise you.

*V.* 15. You are truly the God of my salvation, seeing that you saved me from hell by a mystery, in contemplating which, angels and men will, for all eternity, continually lose themselves in astonishment: for such was your boundless love of me, that

you, my God, were pleased to die on a cross, in exquisite torment, loaden with obloquies and ignominies, to redeem a wretch, who had incurred your most just indignation by his guilt, and deserved nothing but the eternal thunderbolts of your vengeance. O infinite goodness! O ineffable mercy and love! You then, who are the God of my salvation, save me; deliver me again from the "actions of blood," *i. e.*, from the crimes, of which I am guilty, and by which I have profaned and trampled upon your precious blood, spilt for my redemption. Show me this second mercy, and I shall still, with greater justice, praise your goodness with songs of jubilation, without ever ceasing.

*V.* 16. I am able to do nothing without you, much less to pray in a manner agreeable to your divine Majesty. If your grace do not touch my heart, the movement of my lips will be fruitless. Inflame, then, my affections, open and sanctify my lips; then, my heart burning with a desire to extol your greatness, and my mouth pronouncing your praise, my sighs, tears, and homages of adoration will be acceptable to you, my God.

*V.* 17. Penetrated with the deepest sense of adoration and gratitude, I cry out: "What shall I give the Lord for all the good things he has bestowed on me?"—Ps. cxv. 3. Do you desire sacrifices at my hands? With joy I offer you the sacrifice of all I am or have. "My heart is ready, O Lord! my heart is ready."—Ps. lvi. 10. Oh! with what joy do I offer all to you, making a sacrifice of goods, honour, reputation, my own judgment, reason, interests, my body, senses, and life, to do your holy will in all things, and to accept whatsoever it shall please you to appoint or send me! Exterior sacrifices you will not accept. It is myself, it is my heart you demand. "Son, give me thy heart," you say. I tender it to you, a heart dilated with desires to praise you, full of gratitude, ready to receive all things from your holy will, and to undergo and do all things for your honour. O with what joy do I thus sacrifice my heart to your adorable greatness!

*V.* 18. But it must be a bruised heart, broken with sorrow, filled with bitterness for my iniquities. Make mine such; then you cannot but accept it. I fear a superficial repentance which does not change the heart. This I know you abhor. Make mine sincere and perfect. I join it with the victim of the immaculate Lamb, your Son; but even that will not profit me, unless it be accompanied with that of my own heart. If I offer this, contrite and humbled, you will not despise my sacrifice. To make my

offering such, I will weep, mourn, and sigh here below, without intermission. This shall be my ordinary and dearest exercise; my delight and my portion. If to be miserable is enough to make any creature weep, what misery was ever equal to mine? O tears! O groans! you cannot be better employed than in averting this great evil.

*V.* 19. I burn with a desire that my soul be established in grace. Also that, for your honour, your holy Church may triumph and be dilated. It is torn by infidels and heretics, and disfigured by sinners. May your kingdom flourish, and the knowledge of your holy name and love of your goodness reign in all hearts.

*V.* 20. Then sacrifices of praise and thanks shall always burn to you on the altar of my heart, and likewise over your whole Church on earth as in heaven.

### Psalm cxxix. *De Profundis.*

*Verse* 1. From the abyss in which I lie, from the depth of my miseries I have cried aloud to you, O Lord! No abyss can be more horrible than that of sin, in which I am plunged. I raise out of it my eyes and my heart towards you, O source of mercy and comfort! Let my voice, notwithstanding my immense distance, penetrate to your ears; hear my prayer, I most earnestly conjure you. I ask not riches, worldly greatness, or pleasure; I implore your pardon, mercy, and grace, my only good, in comparison of which all other goods are evils. I ask, indeed, a great thing, a favour above all value, and of which I am most unworthy. But you are great, and your bounty and mercy are boundless; and he injures you, who only asks of your omnipotence trifles and foolish earthly things.

*V.* 2. In hell I should cry in vain for all eternity. I now redouble the ardour of my cries, whilst time is. Hear my most earnest supplications, which I send forth from the bottom of my abyss.

*V.* 3. Terrified at the sight of the hideous host of my sins, multiplied beyond the number of the hairs of my head, and of the horrible corruption of my heart, I cry out trembling with fear, with tears and a heart full of bitterness, beseeching you not to look on my iniquities, but on your infinite mercies. If you treat sin with rigour, no one can stand in your presence. All the saints are saved only by your mercy. They all cry out with one voice: "Not to us, O Lord! not to us; but to thy Name give glory." How much less am I able to stand your search, being all defiled, and made up, as it were, of iniquity!

*V.* 4. All my hope and confidence are in your goodness: for, though I am all unworthiness, you are all mercy. You have a fund of infinite goodness and propitiation, and are both able and desirous still to pardon and save me. You have even bound yourself to show mercy to penitents by your holy law, which is an alliance of mercy. This is to me the sure grounds of the most firm hope.

*V.* 5. My soul has hoped in your divine promises, as your word is truth itself, and cannot fail. She has hoped, and continues always to comfort herself in your goodness, and in the riches of your mercy, which are inexhaustible.

*V.* 6. From the morning, or the first moment of my conversion, to the end of my life, amidst all temptations and dangers, I will ever hope in the Lord. His goodness and clemency are my immoveable anchor, which nothing can shake. Let his Church, with all his servants, ever hope in him.

*V.* 7. Because with the Lord there is a boundless ocean of mercy, and a superabundant redemption, surpassing even all the impiety of sinners possible. How sweet is it to a soul, which has offended you, and deserves to be crushed by ten thousand thunderbolts of your justice and anger, to read that "you are full of mercy," that mercy is in your heart as in its centre! O sacred plenitude! O amiable abundance! O inestimable riches! If Cain had truly known you, he could never have said: "My sin is too great to be pardoned." If Judas had considered your desire to forgive, he could never have lost hope. Far from me such an unhappiness. I know your mercy is infinite, and that it is your favourite attribute, and your delight is to exercise it. You even died to redeem me, and purchase me a pardon. I will then knock at the door of your loving merciful heart, and say: Consider not the provocations of my malice, but your ordinary mercy. You came and suffered death to save sinners. Save me, then.

*V.* 8. David foretold your plentiful redemption of us from all our sins. I see it accomplished. Let me not perish after being so wonderfully redeemed. O God! having given your Son a propitiation for me, look on that agreeable victim, and pardon me.

*A Purpose of Satisfaction for Sin, by a penitential Life, in the form of an Appeal from the Tribunal of God's Justice to that of his Mercy.* From Gerson, t. 3, p. 700.

"I, the most ungrateful of all God's children, unworthy to bear that sacred name, the most poor in all merits, and the most full in sin, prostrate myself before the throne of his adorable Majesty,

with a firm resolution to punish my crimes in myself, that I may avert his just vengeance, which I deserve. I see your infinite justice, O Lord! armed against me, and the torments of hell prepared for me. I remember the sins by which I have insulted thy grace, despised thy law, trampled upon, and profaned thy precious blood, and after repentance again returned to the vomit with perfect knowledge, and a thousand circumstances aggravating the malice of my guilt. I am fallen into the hands of the living God, and separated from the society of the saints. Yet you, O powerful great King, terrible Revenger and just Judge! have borne me with patience, and expected my return, that you might have mercy on me. I have prolonged my iniquity, and you have continued your mercy, dissembling my treasons, crimes, and ingratitudes, and not dealing with me according to my offences, but suspending by your mercy the execution of the sentence I have long ago incurred. It is only through your clemency that I do not feel, and for eternity, the torments of the never-dying worm, the piercing flames of hell, and the loss of your enjoyment and of my heavenly inheritance. If you were now to mount your tribunal to sit upon me, I should faint away with fear. Lord, what would my lot be? O just Judge! by this bond written with tears, I beseech you to receive my earnest supplication, and humbly make an appeal from the tribunal of your justice to that of your mercy. I entreat you, O Queen of Mercy, and refuge of sinners! and all ye saints and blessed spirits! earnestly to intercede for me. Again, O God! who art rich in mercy, whose mercies have filled the earth, and surpass all your other works, and who hast promised mercy to all sinners that shall sigh and repent sincerely, I again and again beg that you grant me mercy and pardon. I firmly purpose, by your assistance, to correct my life, avoid all occasions and dangers of sin, and labour to satisfy your justice by penitential works. And I will often renew afresh this my resolution, that I may the more vigorously put it in execution, with constancy and unwearied perseverance. I, from my heart, remit all injuries, and forgive all my enemies, begging that you mercifully forgive me my immense debts, according to your word. O crucified Son of God! who, on your cross, 'were heard for your reverence,' when you prayed for us, offer your prayer and passion to your Father for me, to appease his indignation, and disarm his justice. May I find mercy through your sacred wounds and death."

*The Soul may represent to herself God receiving her Appeal, and returning an Answer to this Purport.*

"By my clemency I allow and admit your appeal, and refer your cause to the tribunal of my mercy, assigning for your peremptory obligation to prosecute here and make good your cause, by a penitential course, all the remaining days of your life; and I propitiously suspend the sentence of my justice pronounced against you, but upon this condition, that you labour in acquitting the debts with which you stand charged to me."

The protestation of the soul, recommended by St. Francis of Sales, is an excellent purpose of amendment of life. See "Garden of the Soul," p. 237. Gerson testifies that he found it of singular efficacy to oblige penitents, especially young persons, firmly to promise to him, by a renovation of their baptismal engagements, not to return to such a sin or any other again. L. de Remed. contra Peccat.

*A short Act of Contrition for a Soul already sufficiently moved to Compunction.*

O God of infinite goodness! I, a vile worm, have insulted your tremendous Majesty, despised your love, abused your inestimable benefits, and violated your sacred laws, yet you love me still, and invite me to return to you. I am pierced to the heart with the most bitter sorrow for having ever offended you, because you are infinitely good; I detest sin above all other evils, and am firmly resolved, by your grace, to avoid all sin, and all occasions of it, especially N. N., those which seem more dangerous to me.

*Another.*

O dearest crucified Redeemer! it grieves me most bitterly that I have ever injured you. I hate and detest sin, the sovereign evil, with a sovereign abhorrence. Ah! unite my sorrow with your divine grief in the garden; touch my hard heart, make my eyes stream in floods of tears, and wash my soul in your precious blood, which alone is able to wipe away its stains. Strengthen me by your grace, that I never more may offend you; and preserve me from all dangers, which I will shun with the utmost care and dread.

## DISCOURSE XXVIII.

### ON TRUE AND FALSE CONTRITION.

"And he held her hand, and the maid arose."—Matt. ix. 25.

As this corpse, stretched ghastly on a bier, deprived of all beauty, sense, or motion, sets before our eyes a lively image of a soul in the frightful state of mortal sin, bereaved of sanctifying grace, and become its own grave; so this carcase, being raised to life by the Almighty hand of our Redeemer, is a true emblem of a soul restored to the life of grace by repentance. And from a slave of the devil, a child of hell, to be made an heir of heaven, and the adopted son of God, is a far greater work, a miracle far more astonishing to the angels and blessed spirits, than for God to create the universe. "It is a greater work to make a just man of a sinner than to create heaven and earth."—St. Aug. Serm. 72. in Joan. By his only word, by the simple act of his will, he produced the world out of nothing, and could with equal ease have created a million of worlds infinitely more perfect; but the remission of one sin, the redemption of one sinner, was to be purchased only by the last drop of his precious blood. Yet repentance is now regarded as a sure and easy work; we see the churches daily filled with pretenders to it, and certainly, did but men generally repent as sincerely as they flatter themselves, the Church at present would be most happy and fertile in saints, far above the primitive ages of fervour; the way to heaven would be no longer strait, nor the gate narrow; scarcely any one would run wilfully into eternal flames, as there are almost none who do not pretend to some degree of penance. But do all rise from sin whom we see frequent the tribunal of confession? Is it not in many a false peace, which only betrays them blindfold into hell, and not a true conversion? This we cannot but be convinced of, not merely from the tears and complaints of the zealous pastors of God's Church, but by daily experience, when we see such great tepidity, so supine an indifference reign among Christians, notwithstanding the frequent use of the sacraments; when we see confessions openly followed by no amendment, but often, perhaps, by greater relapses, and persons always pretending to a fresh conversion, yet always falling back into their sins. What judgment can we frame from hence, but that in general true conversions are very rare, and,

as the prophet complains of the obstinate Jews, like the few grapes left after a careful gleaning; and that these pretended repentances only fill the Church with horrible profanations, and crowd hell with Christian souls? "Therefore has hell dilated its soul, and has opened its mouth without measure." I hope the favourable circumstances in which God's singular mercy has placed you, and a happy ignorance of vice, that securest fence against it and best guardian of virtue, may remove you from the dreadful precipice, at least as to mortal sins: but is there no danger of falling into it by a neglect of the venial faults we pretend to repent of? Besides, lest the bias of our passions and the torrent of the world lead us into this fatal snare, it is necessary to be apprised of it. For this effect I shall endeavour, first, to show that penance which is followed by a speedy relapse is not sincere, and highly pernicious; and, secondly, to explain the sentiments of the Fathers on this subject. Hail, Mary.

It is a truth of the highest evidence, clear from reason as well as from the plainest revelation, that without a true sorrow and contrition of the heart for sin committed—without a sincere detestation of whatever grievously offends God, as of the greatest of all evils, and an effectual resolution of avoiding it and the occasions of it, at any rate—there can be no such thing as forgiveness, no such thing as repentance. This, when perfect, may supply the want of the sacrament when it cannot be had. Confession, absolution, actual performance of satisfactory works, may be dispensed with when impossible; but from hearty contrition, no case of necessity, no plea of inculpable ignorance, no impossibility can ever exempt, nor can sin be ever remitted without it, by any power whatever. If this disposition be wanting in the penitent, all the absolutions and indulgences, given by the fullest power that Christ has left to his Church, can never in the least avail; for will God pardon a soul whilst it continues averse from him, and obstinately refuses to place its last end in him, but fixes it in mortal sin? No, dear Christians, without contrition, all the holy sacraments together—all the adorable blood of Jesus, poured forth for the remission of sins—all the power in heaven and earth—can never remove one mortal sin; and whoever pretends to repent of any sin without this essential disposition, most grievously deceives himself, insults the Church, mocks God, and profanes the most sacred of mysteries and the adorable blood of Christ contained in the sacraments. "This motion of contrition was, at all times, necessary to obtain the remission of sins."—Conc.

Trid. Sess. 4, c. 4. Now, is it possible that one who, after confession returns to the vomit almost on the first occasion, who commits, perhaps before the end of the week, what he pretends to repent for on the Sunday, and whose whole life is made up of pretended penances and as frequent relapses, should ever detest sin as the greatest of evils? This detestation can never be sincere and sovereign; this conversion can never be true, until, with great labour, it forms an entirely new creature. The will must be quite changed; the affections must be removed and separated from their darling objects, and fixed on the opposites; the soul must die to what she most of all loved; in a word, the sinner must, as if he had changed his nature, become another man. "He must lay aside his old conversation, and put off the old man, which he must crucify with all his acts and desires, to be renewed in spirit, and to put on the new man, who was created according to God."—Ephes. iv. 23, 24; Rom. vi. 4, 5, 6. Thus, to repent sincerely, the body of sin must be destroyed, so that the soul never more submit to its slavery; "that the body of sin be destroyed, and we no longer serve sin." The man must die to all his former passions, and rise again, as from the grave, another creature, to walk in the newness of life. Nor is he justified from sin, till he is thus buried to it, and risen again—risen, I say, with Christ, to die no more. This is the idea St. Paul gives us, in express terms, of all true repentance, and no one certainly can imagine, that a person thus changed can ever on a sudden fall back into sin; for the same will, alternately to abhor the same thing with a sovereign hatred, and again so soon to embrace it, is certainly as plain a contradiction as for it sovereignly to love and hate the same object at the same time. The works of God are strong and effectual. He raised not Lazarus from the grave to die immediately again. His cures of the sick and lame were not for an instant, but to be true and to endure. So, when by his grace he justifies a sinner, he makes his conversion not temporary, but able to stand proof against violent attacks. It is a solid and permanent work; an edifice not built on sand; but on a rock, that will bear up against winds and storms. An instant can never overthrow what grace and virtue have raised with infinite pains. An habit of grace is not floating and inconstant; it is settled in firm and lasting dispositions. The heart must be quite changed again before a fall, which cannot be done by every sudden motion. I pretend not that the grace of the sacrament frees a man from temptation, or renders him impeccable, nor that whoever, after

confession, has the misfortune to fall again into mortal sin, must have necessarily profaned the sacrament; but this I advance, if a person easily relapse again, and in a short time—if by former occasions, by ordinary temptations—if he fall without having for some time employed all means against the enemy, without having first experienced many violent conflicts, having made strong resistance and used great efforts, without having struggled earnestly, and maintained his ground a considerable time, then it is plain that his repentance could never have been true. Grace must have been weakened by degrees, a thousand dangers neglected, a thousand smaller infidelities must have paved the way to the fatal precipice. The state of reprobation is not so near a true conversion, the gulf of mortal sin follows not so close on the grace of justification. You will say, our nature is frail; that a man is not the same in a violent temptation as when in the fervour of compunction, so that at the foot of the altar, during a fervent meditation, he may truly detest sin, yet easily embrace it at another time. But whoever frames this objection shows plainly that he takes ineffectual notions of grace for a thorough conversion. Were the change of heart perfect, he would, most certainly, labour to foresee and provide against all dangers. Would you ever be persuaded that a man was in the pursuit of some affair, as if his entire happiness depended upon it, if he studied not the means by which it might be compassed, and endeavoured not to discover and ward off the dangers and prevent unlucky accidents? Or, should a merchant send out a vessel in a dangerous sea, without a fit seaman to govern it at the helm, would you think he truly desired that the persons on board should arrive safe? In this parallel the odds are on my side, as the dangers and necessity are infinitely greater. If, then, a person relapse shortly by occasions, which ought to have been seen or prevented, or by ordinary temptations, for want of having armed himself against them, it is most evident that he has not taken the precautions necessary, and, consequently, had no true contrition, no effectual desire to avoid sin as the greatest of all evils. Many flatter themselves, that they alone can sound their own hearts, and judge of their own secret dispositions; but, of all persons in the world, they are often the most incapable for this purpose. The bias of their passions sways them, immoderate self-love blinds them, and some faint desires and resolutions of amendment deceive them, so that they mistake these for a thorough change and conversion. We see, in the example of St. Augustin, that

a sinner may, nay usually has very strong velleities long before his heart is completely changed. But, he says, he is sure his final resolution is taken: "Believe him not. I do not say he tells a lie; he believes what he says."—Seneca, Ep. 112. ad Lucilium. He says, he has now an entire aversion for his past life. I believe him; for who can but detest and hate it? "Men both love and hate their lives." Let him, then, excuse us from pronouncing him sincere, till, by a change of life, he shall have convinced both himself and us of it. Thus, then, you see it is by the effects alone—by the amendment of his life alone, that a sinner can prove the sincerity of his conversion, either to himself or to others. To himself, I say; because it is by this alone he can distinguish effectual resolutions from faint desires or wishes; to others, because all other signs of a conversion are generally equivocal. The same words and protestations are common to the greatest penitents and to the most hardened sinners. Saul used as strong expressions as King David did to Nathan; consequently these can be no certain mark. Tears, also, and sighs are very treacherous and deceitful; they may often proceed more from some human motive, or a natural tenderness of constitution, than from a true conversion. Who would not have been convinced by the lamentable sighs of Saul, Esau, and Antiochus, for their sins, which yet touched not the heart of God? We have, then, no other certain rule to judge of our own or others' conversion than this laid down by our Redeemer himself:- "By their fruits ye shall know them." For what end, then, do sinners in the world frequently importune the priest for absolution, before they have put their conversion to the test, or, perhaps, when they find this mark evidently to fail them? What madness is it so earnestly to sue for what will be your mortal poison? O excess of madness! Such an absolution can only blind you with a false peace, and precipitate you and your blind guide into hell. "If the blind lead the blind," &c. Penance is, indeed, a tribunal of mercy; but of God's, not of man's. An inferior and subaltern judge can proceed only according to the will of the sovereign, who is God, and who alone can prescribe or dispense with his conditions. Then only is our sentence profitable, when it is ratified in the supreme court of heaven. St. Greg.: "O excess of madness! You are angry with him who strives to avert the wrath of God; you threaten him who endeavours to draw down the mercy of God upon you, who is a better judge of your wound than you can pretend to be, who sheds tears for you while your eyes

remain dry." But let us examine, in a word or two, what were the sentiments on this point of those great saints and doctors of the Church, who were raised by God, and particularly inspired by him, to conduct the souls which he had redeemed with his precious blood, through the path of true penance. These holy men were chosen by Almighty God to deliver down to us, by their mouths and pens, the faith which he was pleased himself to teach us, and the rules of Christian morality and penance. We cannot receive their faith, and reject their morality.

A large treatise would not suffice to copy out all that the Fathers have written relating to the subject we are treating of. As the principal end of the preaching of the Gospel was to announce to all men to do penance, so there is no point on which they exercise their zeal with greater energy. I shall content myself with two short remarks on their practice and doctrine. First, so cautious were they not to expose our adorable mysteries to the profanation of sinners, or to "give holy things to dogs," that if any one, after having once performed public penance (which was enjoined for all sins whatsoever against the sixth commandment, and most other mortal sins), had the misfortune to fall again, he was never after to be admitted to it a second time; but remained excluded from the participation of the sacraments till death. Tert., Amb., Pac., Cypr., &c. The reason they universally give for it is: he that relapses after penance could never ordinarily have the dispositions of a true penitent; for to rise and to fall again "is not doing penance, but a criminal hypocrisy."*—Hence St. Isidore, l. de Summo Bono, c. 16, and from him the body of the canon law, Dist. 3. de Pœnit. cap. Irrisor: "He is a false penitent, who lives as if he never repented. He does not approach the tribunal of mercy as a supplicant, but mocks his Judge. The penitent, who relapses into sin, is like the dog who returns to the vomit. The sinner who bewails, but repeats his former transgressions, may be said to be washed; but he is not cleansed."

My second observation is; they so much feared being imposed upon by false penitents, that they never admitted any one to his first penance, even after one mortal sin, till after a long trial and all possible marks of sincerity. They would have them beg long and earnestly, "to throw themselves at the feet of the priests, to kneel down before the friends of God, and recommend themselves to the prayers of the faithful." Tertull. de Pœnit. c. 9. And

* Hoc non est agere pœnitentiam, sed fingere.

St. Ambrose de Pœnit. c. 16: "Let the sinner hope for forgiveness, let him pray for it with tears, let him employ the supplications of the people to obtain it; and if his absolution be deferred even a second and third time, let him persuade himself that he has not prayed as he ought." And again, l. 2, c. 9: "Some," says he, "ask penance so as to be immediately admitted to the communion; these seek not to disburden their own consciences; but only to charge the priest and make him partner in their crimes."—This holy father, writing against the Novatians, who denied that fornication and several other sins could be forgiven by the keys of the Church, learnedly refutes that abominable heresy; but in such a manner, that he would now-a-days be condemned by many as a very great rigorist. Yet, he has one sentence, which terrifies me above all the rest: "It is easier to find a person, who has preserved his innocence, than one who has sincerely repented."* l. 2, c. 10. He lived in an age, indeed, in which several were not baptized till somewhat advanced in years, but in which every particular church abounded with conspicuous examples of astonishing penitents, of which he himself gives us frequent surprising instances; whose austerities seem to have surpassed those of the most rigorous religious orders, who furrowed their cheeks with continual floods of tears, fasted on bread and water, lay on the bare ground, interdicted themselves all public or private merriments and diversions, watched in penitential garments at the church door, prostrating themselves at the feet of all who entered, begging their prayers at the foot of the altar, to which they considered themselves unworthy to be admitted. Yet amongst these conspicuous examples does this saint, eminent among all the Fathers for his extreme mildness towards sinners, break into this dreadful sentence; for the reason of which he adds, that, for a sinner to repent, he must totally die to what he was, put on new affections, become a new creature, and be transformed into another man, "that he be totally changed."† Like a young man, who, having been engaged in a criminal conversation, repented and went into a foreign country, that, free from the occasions, he might labour to extirpate his sinful passion, afterwards returning home he met his mistress a first and a second time, but saluted her not. She, surprised, thought he did not know her, and said: "I am such

* Facilius inveni qui innocentiam servaverint, quam qui congrue egerint pœnitentiam.

† Ut totus immutetur.

a one;" but he answered, "I am not such a one;" meaning that he was no longer the same man, but had now other thoughts, other views, and other affections. Now, to admit sinners to communion before this thorough change be wrought in their souls, is to betray them into hell under the appearance of peace. This St. Cyprian (de Laps.) complains of as of greater danger, and a more pernicious evil in the Church, than all the political and cruel inventions of persecutors. He calls it "a new misfortune, a delusive false peace," contrary to the law of God and the tenor of the Gospel; which is not a peace, but a war; which restores not lost grace or peace, but destroys all the means, by which it might be obtained. (Cap. 31, Pam. 30, Felli.) The clergy of Rome, and St. Cyprian with them, say that is not to heal, but in truth to destroy outright. Thus, you see that the devil, from the beginning of the Church, always employed this engine with great success; and we frequently meet with penitentials abolished for pretending to dispense men from the laws of the Gospel in doing penance. But in these our latter ages the locusts of the Apocalypse are broke loose in swarms, and labour to enervate every branch of Christian morality; and by this means ruin thousands of souls hitherto triumphant over the attempts of heresy and schism. As this fatal abuse flatters men's passions, and allows them a licentious sway, in spite of zeal and example it stands its ground, is proof against virtue, and continues its havoc. The Fathers feared that if discipline were relaxed, impunity would increase offences. "An easy pardon produces a frequency of sin." —St. Ambr. in Ps. 118. What they justly dreaded we see unhappily fulfilled. And does it not happen, that men indulge their passions without remorse, thinking that all will be remitted with an hour's easy task? So truly is that saying of St. Augustin verified (Serm. 35. de Div.): "If justification were easily recovered, it would be mere sport for a man to fall by sin into death."*

From the purport of this discourse we may gather these three corollaries.

*First.* If any one, having confessed a mortal sin, falls again in a short time without any strong endeavours, and by ordinary temptations, it is plain he had no contrition, and made no valid confession.

* Si cito rediret homo ad pristinam beatitudinem, ludus illi esset peccato cadere in mortem.

*Secondly.* Those who confess venial sins, and continue in them as much as ever after the sacrament, must also have been guilty of a sacrilege, for want of necessary contrition, if these were the whole matter of the confession.

*Thirdly.* Though it be a commendable practice in ordinary confessions for persons to add, besides the smaller imperfections, some more considerable sin of their life past, of which they have the greatest remorse, and for which they may be more secure of their contrition, yet it is a great abuse, and of very pernicious consequence, to neglect in the contrition the present failings of their life:

Because, this tepid, negligent disposition will, perhaps, in a short time, extend itself to the other sins of their life past, committed long ago, often confessed, and so little reflected on. And because the chief end of this sacrament is the amendment of the present life, in which not always to advance is the beginning of the road to a fatal precipice.

As often, then, as we frequent the sacrament of penance, let us renew our sorrows for the sins of our life past; let our hearts bleed afresh for them; let our contrition for them be every time more and more perfect, as by length of time we ought to have advanced more in charity and virtue. Let us also detest all smaller imperfections as fully as possible. With what floods of tears did the saints daily wash away their slightest failings of surprise and inadvertence! In a word, let us never forget to take time and the necessary means to excite in our souls a true and perfect contrition for all our offences, though ever so small; and to form such effectual resolutions, that we may say, "It is time that sin should yield, and iniquity be destroyed" (Dan. ix. 24); not with a half will. "We must will strongly and universally, we must no longer fluctuate between vice and virtue" (St. Aug. l. 8, Conf. c. 8); nor with the faint desire of the lazy; "the slothful man wills and wills not" (Prov. xiii.); but with such a will as may always answer the enemy: "I have opened my mouth to the Lord, and I can do no otherwise."—Jud. ii. 35. Pray earnestly that God may always preserve this resolution in its fervour. "O Lord God! grant that I may persevere unto the end in this will."—1 Par. xxix. 18. Foresee and take all possible precautions to avoid the least occasion. Rely not on your own strength against them. A man placed in them is quite another from what he is at his prayers. Adam fell in paradise by company; David by an accidental occasion; the prince of the

apostles, though he dearly loved his divine Master, at the voice of a silly maid. Fly from every shadow of danger, every appearance of evil, as from a precipice, or the face of a serpent. Eccl. xxi. If we frequented often in this manner the tribunal of penance, what victory should we not daily gain? How soon should we not be perfect in the performance of even the smallest action? How should we daily run from virtue to virtue, till we shall see God, and be seen in Sion, from whom we shall receive the plentiful reward of our small labours, the glorious crown of our short conflicts, &c.?

## DISCOURSE XXIX.

### ON EXTERIOR WORKS OF PENANCE OR SATISFACTION.

1. Though the essence of penance consists in the interior, or contrition of the heart, without which all exterior austerities are but counterfeit or mere shadows, and, as it were, a body without a soul, yet the interior alone does not constitute the whole of this virtue, which also requires exterior works, as its fruit and essential complement. Penance, or the practice of it, is scarcely ever named in Holy Scripture, without express mention of exterior austerities as making up a part of it; for example, fasting, sackcloth, ashes, &c. This we find in the repentance of the Ninevites, in that of David, in that of the Jews, as often as they pretended to return from sin to God. This Almighty God and his prophets everywhere enjoin and exhort true penitents to. Thus, Daniel gave that counsel to Nabuchodonosor: "Redeem thy sins with alms."—Dan. iv. 24. The heretics, who confine penance to the interior alone, excluding all works of satisfaction, invent a new kind of it, entirely unknown in Scripture and to the ancient penitents. Those Catholics who totally neglect the practice of the exterior, adopt that maxim in their conduct, which they condemn in their faith.

2. God could remit all sin, without requiring any satisfaction, as he does in baptism, by which all sins committed before it are so blotted out, that there remains no satisfaction due for them, nor any temporal punishment, as has been the constant tradition of the Church. "There is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus."—Rom. viii. 1. But the perfidiousness and sacri-

lege of those who relapse, after having received the inestimable benefit of sanctifying grace, make the case of such sinners very different. God mercifully admits them again to a free pardon, upon their sincere repentance; but on this condition, that, by a voluntary chastising of sin in themselves, they make some atonement to his injured justice; in which, if they are too slothful, he reserves to himself to inflict on them some temporal punishment either in this life, or in purgatory in the world to come. This article of our faith is clear, from the perpetual practice and tradition of the Church, from the very idea of penance, which is given us in the Holy Scripture, and from the clearest examples and passages contained in it. This we see in David. His sin is declared to be forgiven him. 2 Kings, xxii. 13. Yet the prophet adds in the same place, that it should be punished with the death of the child, and that on its account blood should not depart from his house. Ib. v. 10. Nor could his tears avert the execution of the threat. Again, after his sin for numbering his people was forgiven him, the choice of a punishment was left to him; whether war, famine, or pestilence. 2 Kings, xxiv. Also, the murmuring of the Israelites in the desert was pardoned them (Num. xiv. 20), yet God adds in the very same place, that, on account of it, all of them should die in the wilderness, except Josue and Caleb. Moses and Aaron were certainly received into God's favour, after their sin for not glorifying God at the rock; nevertheless, both are condemned to die, without seeing the land of promise, on account thereof; as we read of Aaron (Num. xx. 24), and of Moses, Deut. xxxii. 1. A prophet was killed by a lion, on his journey, in punishment of an act of disobedience, who is, however, described as a saint, and his death as precious in the sight of God. 3 Kings, xiii.

3. All the satisfaction of creatures could never expiate any one sin. Christ alone could repair the injury it offered to God. This he did by a superabundant satisfaction for us. All remission of sin, or of any punishment due to it, is a gratuitous mercy of God's pure grace, and the fruit of Christ's sacred passion. Still, it requires certain conditions on our side, such as a sincere repentance and contrition, and also some satisfaction. It belongs to the giver of a grace or favour to prescribe the conditions, under which he bestows it, as God is pleased to do in penance. This hinders not the pardon from being a purely gratuitous mercy, as our satisfaction is noways adequate towards compensating the injury of sin; nor would it be of any virtue, unless by God's

gracious acceptance, the promise of which is purely gratuitous; nor is it anyways derogatory to the merits of Christ, as it is not required to supply a deficiency in them, which are infinite and superabundant, but as a condition stipulated before this fruit of them should be imparted to a sinner. Christ did not so suffer for him, as that he should be wholly exempt from doing anything for himself. He will have him to undergo some voluntary chastisement on his side; which yet does not efface any of the sin by itself, it being no more than a condition, upon which the merits of Christ's blood are communicated to us, without which there can be no remission. Of this satisfaction St. Paul says (1 Cor. ix. 37), "I fulfil those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ in my flesh." I adore your mercy, O God! in thus raising us by the merits of your Son's sacred passion imparted to us, and accepting our low endeavours for the acquitting of our immense debts. And I acknowledge, as your holy Church teaches me, that in your merciful pardon for sin committed after baptism, you require of us a voluntary chastisement of our offences in ourselves, as a reparation of the injury done to you, a true satisfaction to your justice, and a redemption of the temporal punishment due to sin, after its guilt is remitted, which remission is granted only on these terms.

By this conduct of Almighty God in holy penance, we admire both justice and mercy tempered together. We learn the difference of sins committed after holy baptism. We also see the difference between the sacraments of baptism and penance. The first, being a regeneration, is more easy: the latter, being a restoration after a relapse, operates by medicinal adustions, incisions, and bitter remedies. The Fathers frequently repeat another reason of this greater severity in penance, lest, if the remedy were too light, men should more easily return to sin.

4. The works of satisfaction are: 1. Contrition of heart, which, as it is an affliction of the mind and something penal, is satisfactory. It is the doctrine of divines, that this may be so perfect and fervent, as to suffice alone to remit all the temporal punishment due to sin, together with its guilt. 2. Prayer and sacrifice. 3. Fasting and chastisement of the flesh. 4. Alms-deeds. Innumerable passages of Scripture and Fathers might be produced for each of these; as Tob. iv. 11: "Alms deliver from all sin and death." Prov. xvi. 6: "Iniquity is redeemed by mercy and truth," &c. St. Augustine observes, that "under fasting is comprised all chastisement of the body; under alms, benevolence and beneficence in

giving and forgiving; under prayer, all the rules of holy desires." —De Perf. Justit. t. 10, p. 174.

Penance is practised not only by austerities; but also by denying ourselves even any innocent pleasures. If we are too cowardly to seek these crosses, let us at least not reject those, which God sends us, and which we receive every day from heat, cold, disappointments, contradictions, afflictions, &c. Let us cheerfully accept those in patience, with a desire to glorify God by them, by satisfying his holy justice, and destroying in our souls all the traces of sin. What goodness in our Judge, that he is pleased to accept for our sins, pains which we cannot avoid, even those to which this miserable life necessarily subjects us! What cowardice in us, if we neglect to pay our debts at so cheap a rate, and choose obstinately to reserve them for the rigour of God's justice! It is a cruelty to ourselves to neglect to redeem by light satisfactions what will otherwise cost us most dear.

5. Pretended penitents extol the efficacy and merit of interior penance, so as to deny, in a great measure, the necessity and advantages of the exterior, to exempt themselves from its laborious exercise, by which the life of a Christian ought to be a continued lingering martyrdom of penance, as it is usually styled by the masters of a spiritual life. How do these accumulate debts, that are to be most severely exacted to the last farthing? Again, do not such persons generally deceive themselves as to the sincerity of their contrition? Certainly, we have the greatest reason to fear it; for an act of contrition cannot be sincere without a firm purpose of satisfying for sin by a penitential course. If this were not at least virtually included in it, the repentance was only counterfeit, as this purpose of satisfaction is an essential part of it. It is expressed in its definition by most divines. The Scripture and Councils mention it as a requisite ingredient. Now, if a penitent have this real desire and purpose, will he not carry it into execution, according to the circumstances of his state and opportunities? A true spirit of penance will find occasions continually, and cannot fail often to lay hold of them. A particular ardour in this duty is required in the penitential times ordained by the Church, and in sinners upon their first conversion, as they stand in need of this remedy in a special manner, to expiate their offences, and to strengthen themselves in their yet weak spiritual state.

6. It is from the Fathers, those channels through which our faith was conveyed down to us, and by whom its genuine practice

was faithfully cultivated, that we are to learn the true maxims of penance. They have left us entire excellent books on this subject. One or two passages from them may suffice, which will express the drift of their whole works. Tertullian, the most ancient of the Latins, of whom we have many large works, in his book on Penance, c. 10, p. 127, writes thus: "Penance is the discipline of protestation and humiliation, prescribing a conversation proper to draw down mercy, giving precepts even as to dress and tables, to lie on sackcloth and ashes, to clothe the body meanly and sordidly, to afflict the mind with sorrow, and to change the delights of sin into grief; to live only on bread and water, to nourish by fasts and frequent prayer, to sigh, weep, and howl to God day and night, to cast themselves at the feet of the priests, and fall on their knees to the servants of God, and to conjure all the brethren by their prayers to become intercessors to God in their behalf. Penance pronounces sentence against the sinner for the justice and indignation of God, and by a temporal affliction not so properly averts, as perfectly overcomes, eternal torments. As much as you shall not have spared yourself, be persuaded that God will so much the more spare you."—C. 11, p. 128. He complains that some dread penance on account of its austerities. He asks these if a life of ease and vanity can ever satisfy for sin? Penitents must use all contrary severities, and answer to those that shall ask them the reason, or invite them to mirth: "I have sinned against God, and am in danger of perishing everlastingly, therefore I am now anxious and tortured in mind, and macerate my body to reconcile God to me, whom I have offended by sinning." He bids them see what heathens undergo for the world, and reflect on hell, which penance will extinguish; on the consideration of its grievous torments, no one can startle at the remedy.

St. Cyprian says (Tr. de Lapsis, p. 96): "Let us appease his anger and displeasure by fasting, weeping, and mourning, as he admonishes us." And p. 98, ib.: "It is necessary for penitents to pray more earnestly, to pass the day in mourning, and the night in watching and weeping, spending all their time in tears and lamentations; to have no beds but ashes, no clothing but haircloth and poor mourning weeds; after having cast off the garments of Christ to wear no worldly garments; after feeding with devils to choose fasting; earnestly to employ themselves in good works, by which sins are cleansed; to give frequent alms, by which souls may be delivered from death. Does she mourn who still puts on costly apparel?" &c.

St. Ambrose, l. 2. de Pœnit., p. 417, writes thus: "I have more easily found such as have preserved innocence than such as have done due penance. The world is to be renounced, sleep to be shorter than nature usually requires; it is to be abridged by sighs, to be broken by groans, its time set apart for prayer; such a life is to be led as may be a dying to all the enjoyments of life, that a man deny himself and be all changed." And again, lib. de Laps. Virg. p. 314: "You are to extinguish in yourself all care of this life, thinking only how to recover your spiritual life. Put on poor mourning weeds, punish your will and every member with a due chastisement. Let your face grow pale, your eyes always stand in tears, your whole body be macerated with fastings, and covered with haircloth and ashes, and your heart melt within you by compunction," &c. And on the 37th Psalm, p. 820: "He who does penance ought to be ready to bear injuries, and not be moved if he hear himself reproached with his crime. For, as he accuses himself, how will he not bear another accusing him? He is to offer himself to punishment, to be here chastised by our Lord, and not spared for eternal torments. He ought to meet the divine indignation."

St. Pacian, one of the most elegant and learned Fathers of the fourth century, defines thus what it is to do penance (Paræsis ad Pœnit., p. 317): "To weep in the sight of the church, to go meanly clad, to fast, pray, prostrate himself; if any one call to the bagnio, to refuse delights; if any one invite to a feast, to say: Such things are for happy souls, which have never sinned; I have offended the Lord, and am in danger of perishing everlastingly. What have I to do with banquets, who have injured the Lord? Moreover, to take hold of the hands of the poor, entreat the widows, fall down at the feet of the priests, beg the whole Church to employ themselves in prayers for him, and to try all means not to be eternally lost."

7. In external penitential austerities the greatest care is to be taken that they be accompanied with the most fervent inward spirit possible, as this alone gives them all their merit. The penitential soul, seeing her infinitely holy God hating and persecuting sin, as the enemy of his glory, enters into sentiments conformable to his, conceives the most sovereign hatred possible of this evil, and the most sincere desire utterly to destroy that object of his abomination, and prevent his justice by revenging on herself the injuries by which she had dishonoured him.

Is anything more honourable or more just than thus to act in

concert with the divine justice in the destruction of sin, than for the sinner to punish his own offences in himself? Such a satisfaction is so much the more honourable to God, as free choice in works intended for his glory honours him more than a suffering by constraint; and, as it is voluntarily undertaken out of the motive of his holy love, and in conformity with his divine justice.

8. The sinner enters upon the exercise of penance with an ardent desire to discharge the debts he has contracted to Almighty God. A just man is always anxious speedily to satisfy all his creditors, and would never die without having paid off all his debts, when he has it in his power to do it. This ought to be much more so in what we owe to our God, our Creator, infinite Benefactor, sovereign happiness, and last end. It is always an obstacle to perfect friendship to owe anything to a friend, except that debt or obligation of still loving him, which can never be exhausted. Rom. xiii. 8.

Our own interest also ought to oblige us to this. If reserving debts only to pay by force is immensely to increase our accounts, "it is a new offence to have sinned, and not to satisfy; to have injured God, and not to weep for the injury;" as St. Cyprian writes (de Laps.) The voluntary chastisement of sin in ourselves, with the merit of patience and virtue, through the sacred merits of Christ, is far more light and easy than that of another world. Which do I choose? I must renounce my reason if I say the latter, and my faith if I deny both. "All iniquity, whether it be great or small," says St. Augustin (Serm. 11, pa. 58, n. 18, t. 4, p. 565), must necessarily be punished either by the man penitent, or by an avenging God: for he who repents truly will chastise himself. Absolutely either you punish yourself, or he punishes. Would you that he should not punish? then punish yourself. He repeats the same in several other sermons, as in the 19th, 20th, &c.

St. John Climacus relates (Gr. 4, c. 5), that a certain monk, named Antiochus, went in this spirit to live in a very severe monastery, under an exceedingly harsh superior. On the first night, in his sleep, he seemed to see certain severe persons, demanding of him a terrible account of one hundred pounds of gold. Awaking in the morning, he said to himself: "Poor Antiochus, we lie under a heavy debt, and have a great sum to pay off." After three years spent in great austerities, he saw ten pounds blotted out in the schedule of his debts. Alarmed and terrified, he redoubled still his fervour in penance, and, to suffer

more, feigned himself foolish, bore with invincible patience and joy all manner of insult and ill-treatment, and made himself, as it were, the ass of the house, to carry the heaviest burdens of everybody. After thirteen years, he found his whole debt effaced.

9. The virtue of penance belongs to vindictive justice, which is employed in punishing crimes in proportion to their deserts; it is a species contained under it, as St. Thomas observes. The satisfaction, therefore, for sins must be greater, according to their heinousness and number. It is to follow the rule of the divine justice, in the place of which it substitutes itself to satisfy and prevent its more heavy severity. This the Fathers frequently put penitents in mind of. "Let the greatness of your grief equal the enormity of your sins," says St. Cyprian (de Lapsis, p. 98). "Let not a long and diligent remedy be wanting to a deep wound: Let not the penance be less than the crime." And St. Gregory the Great, quoted by St. Isidore, l. 2. Sent. c. 13, p. 440: "He doeth penance worthily who laments his fall by a proportioned satisfaction, condemning himself the more severely as he has been more guilty." The stripes must be proportioned to the crime.

A penitent must, therefore, ascend the tribunal in his own soul against himself. And, as it is not enough in justice that a criminal be convicted and condemned, but he is also to be executed, so, after having carefully examined, impartially accused, and condemned his own criminal heart before God, he must inflict upon it, and its instrument or accomplice the flesh, a punishment sufficient to satisfy the inflexible justice of God. It belongs not to him to spare; that is only in the power of his sovereign, according to whose rules he is to pronounce upon himself; and let him lean to severity rather than to mildness, knowing "that God will the more spare him the more he shall not have spared himself," as Tertullian and St. Cyprian repeat. Christian penitents, says the former, always judge severely, being certain of the rigorous tribunal at which we are hereafter to be tried.

10. We must also love and embrace penance, to secure ourselves from present and future dangers. How can we complain that we are tempted violently, and that the flesh revolts, whilst we neglect the means to subdue it, and the means to which God has annexed his graces of victory? Let us animate ourselves against our body, which ought to be the slave of the soul, but which, by pampering and flattering, we make the master. Let us, in this holy hatred of so dangerous an enticer to evil, and in this holy spirit of pe-

nance, treat it severely; and we shall find its habits weakened and our soul strengthened. The great reason of souls making so little progress in perfection, and in mastering their passions, is their general aversion to the practice of penance and mortification.

11. Men, to exempt themselves from the practice of penitential works, call them works of supererogation, and allege their bitterness and the weakness of their own constitution. By these pretexts they deceive themselves, and, though they would pass for faithful Christians, live like professed enemies of penance and of the cross of Christ. The essential and nobler part is indeed the interior, but the exterior is also an indispensable part. Are not the precepts of the Gospel most express and strong? In the lists of saints and true Christians, can I find one whose life was not a perpetual penance? Even those who were always preserved most pure from the corruption of any sin, like the Baptist, lived innocent martyrs of penance; nor could they, without its protection, have ever maintained their virtue, or obtained the graces they received. I have rebellious passions to subdue, a world and a Satan to fight against; penance is my armour. I am a Christian; consequently, by obligation, a penitent. I have also other reasons to rank myself in this class. I have sinned grievously. I cannot hope to be saved by the path of innocence; I must, then, walk in that of penance, and live by its laws, or I cannot hope for salvation.

12. Faint-hearted penitents are afraid of mortification because it is bitter. Penance must be so. The sinner offended by pleasure; this must be expiated by chastisement. Is it not a happiness to appease an offended God, and sheath the sword of his indignation? Is it not a false pity here to spare ourselves? If a man, out of a cowardly delicacy, dare not press a sore hard enough to cleanse it, and suffer it to grow worse, and perhaps turn to a gangrene, is not this an ill-placed tenderness? Or will not the surgeon who sees him squeeze the ulcer more roughly? So will God prepare much more grievous chastisements for those who refuse to undertake sufficient penances. "He who is afraid of the hoar-frosts shall fall into the snow."—Job, vi. 16.

But, though penance be contrary to sensuality and to the corrupt inclinations of nature, yet true penitents find more real content in weeping for their sins and mortifying their passions, than they ever did in gratifying them. A contrite heart finds a sweetness in tears as in its most delicious food. "Thou shalt feed us with the bread of tears."—Ps. lxxix. Other mortifications also

have peculiar sweetness in them, which a true penitent would not exchange for all the pleasures of the world. The solid hope of pardon and the recovery of God's friendship, with all its incomparable advantages, are sufficient to mitigate their rigour; and the unction of the Holy Ghost often makes them sweet. This St. Augustin testifies: "Tears themselves are sweet, and shall be as a delicious food."—Euar. in Ps. 126. And again: "Behold thou art there in the heart of those who confess to thee and weep in thy bosom; and thou mildly wipest away their tears that they may weep more and rejoice in their weeping."—Conf. l. 5, c. 11. Let others, then, fear penance, who do not love it, who carry its yoke without its spirit; but to these its tears are like spring showers, which bring gaiety, joy, and plenty. For a true spirit of penance inspires a certain love of penitential works, as it excites an insatiable desire to destroy sin and its instruments, with all the obstacles of grace, to advance in charity, and resemble Christ covered with wounds for us, bearing the ensigns of penance in his holy body for our pattern.

13. Many excuse themselves on account of the weakness of their constitution. But these, so delicate and tender in penance, can often resist fire for the world, though they melt at the first beam of the sun for virtue. If it be for company, for play, for dancing, or some whim, diversion, or honour, they can watch, fast, fatigue themselves, or curb their passions, without so much as thinking of it; but to satisfy for sins, the least inconvenience or constraint to nature is insupportable; the least sickness of stomach is magnified as mortal, though it perhaps be only the wholesome effects of temperance. Excesses in austerities are, however, to be guarded against. To avoid this danger, let every one follow, in the choice of his course, the advice of a discreet director, not apt to flatter. "For he that makes himself the master of his own spiritual conduct, makes himself the disciple of a mad governor," as St. Bernard says, Ep. 87. The very renouncing of self-will in this choice will be the first advantage gained towards the end proposed in satisfaction.

Every one can bear, in a spirit of penance, the crosses and sufferings which God sends and those to which nature is subject. Every one can deny himself many satisfactions and worldly enjoyments. Every one can refuse his senses and inclinations in many things, saying to himself: I have offended God, and must appease his indignation by punishing my criminal flesh or heart. Let fasts, alms, and the like works be proportioned to every one's

capacity and exigencies. Any impossibility in them may be made up other ways, at least by more frequent penitential aspirations and prayers. Every one must, in the first place, retrench occasions of sins: if he has offended by his tongue, his eyes, or ears, these must be restrained, &c. His heart must be more diligently watched; sloth and sensuality curbed. Every one must also laboriously employ himself in the occupations of his calling. For the rest, let no one flatter himself with groundless suggestions of self-love against other austerities.

Ah! it is not that penance is impracticable in my circumstances, but because I want courage and fervour to undertake it, that I am dismayed at it. If I once resolutely enter upon it in a proper manner, I shall be surprised to see how vain my fears of it were. It is only the first commencement which seems severe to nature, not yet accustomed to its yoke, nor yet tasting its unction and sweetness.

How am I ashamed of my base cowardice and sloth when I look at the examples of innumerable holy penitents! I see thousands, young and old, sick and healthy, strong and weak, of all ages, sexes, and countries, walking cheerfully in the path of most austere penance, and shall I allege impossibilities? Not to speak of the many examples of distant ages, let me but visit the ladies of the Ave Maria in Paris, the deserts of Camaldoli, Septfons, Orval, &c., and I shall find enough to confound my delicacy. Can I do nothing, whilst I see many, more tender and weak, cheerfully doing so much?

14. Consider only the reformed Cistercians of La Trappe, a monastery in Perche, five leagues from Belesme, three from Mortagne, in the diocese of Séez, on the confines of Normandy, in a country the most nearly resembling the English climate and soil of any in France. The house is low-built,* in a square, mean, and without any ornaments except those in the church. It stands a league distant from the village, in the midst of a great forest, but has a middling cheap inn near it, for the convenience of such strangers as do not choose to live with the monks; for they should content themselves almost with their fare. In the year 1746, when I saw it, there were in this house sixty lay-brothers and fifty choir monks, of whom eighteen were priests; for they promote none to orders after their admission among them. There

* When the author wrote this work. Alas! what the haters of pure religion have done.—Ed.

were three oblaters, a sort of half lay-brothers, who can speak to one another or to strangers. One of these comes out to any stranger, falls down at his feet, conducts him into a chapel to say a prayer, and thence into a parlour or guest-room, in which hang rules which strangers are desired to observe there; particularly, that they mention nothing of news, and be very short in all their questions and words. Whoever they may be, the abbot or guest-master alone can speak to them or entertain them. These monks, before their profession, write to their friends in the world for the last time, to take their farewell and order their goods to be given to the poor, for they are not allowed to give anything to the monastery. After this, they can never more write to, or hear from any friend, not even a parent, or speak to him if he come to see them in the monastery, though the abbot usually gives them leave to show themselves before him. If any one's parent or other relation die, only the abbot receives the news of it, and he tells the religious, all together, that God has called to himself one of their fathers, brothers, &c., and bids them all pray for him; but no one hears whose it is. They never speak to any secular, not even a father, on any account whatsoever, nor ever hear of what passes in the world, whether it be in war or peace, what kings rule, &c., only that the abbot usually recommends to their prayers the public affairs of the Church or State, without giving them any detail. Only the abbot and master of novices know who are admitted into the house, or what belongs to them. They can never speak to one another, only by signs, except to their confessor or superior. They never contract any familiarities together. No one there is ever named but by his name in religion, and they only know one another by sight at most, nor a great part of their house even so. A monk dying expressed to his abbot a great solicitude for a brother, thinking him yet in the world, though he had been many years a professed religious in the same house; and for his satisfaction, he was ordered by his superior to show himself before him. They usually keep their eyes cast down on the ground, and only see those next to them, nor then but by their habit. They make a low reverence to strangers that pass by them; but never look up or see any more of them than the lower part of the clothes. Walking in the refectory, I could not perceive any one that gave one glance of curiosity. This puts us in mind of Innocent the Third, one of the greatest Popes that ever governed the Church, who, returning from the Emperor's court in the most magnificent state, and with the greatest attendance, visiting St. Bernard's

Monastery, observed that no one of the religious lifted up his eyes to see him or any of his train, so much were they dead to all curiosity, to their senses, and to whatsoever could dissipate their souls or interrupt their attention to God; which made him look upon this house as the miracle of the world. The recollection of the monks of La Trappe in the fields, at work, at meals, and in all their actions, is most moving; but, above all, in the church.

They do everything by obedience, and are not to take one step by their own choice. They are bound to obey, not only superiors, but also one another, by the least signs which the last lay-brother shall give them, though they by it may spoil all their work, as happened to one who by that means spoiled all their singing-books; for, as Abbot John told the gardener, it were better they should be without herbs than have any plants of self-will. That abbot, walking with a bishop in the garden, ordered a religious, passing by without a reverence, because he did not see them, to fall prostrate: he obeying, lay so two hours, till the abbot returning that way found him still in that posture, and bade him rise. Another, in obedience, continued to discipline himself several hours, till others informed the abbot, who, coming again, found him all bloody, yet not ceasing, because he had not fixed a time. Hence, even to refuse any service offered by another passes for a great crime amongst them. The venerable abbot of Chatillon, being there only a visitant, going up to his cell, a monk offered to light him up stairs, to whom he made a sign of refusal out of humility on his side. Though he was a stranger, one of singular piety, and eighty years of age, abbot John next day summoned him to chapter, proclaimed his fault, and reproached him in this manner: "Is it possible that, after being abbot twenty-five years, you should not know the first rules of charity and the first principles of your order! You had little to do to quit your own house to ruin the discipline of ours. I recommend you to the prayers of the community, and enjoin you to wait kneeling at the church-door, when the religious pass thither after dinner."

They never say anything, even indirectly, in commendation of their house or order, to most persons a common topic of secret refined pride under a public name; for every individual appropriates to himself tacitly a share of such praise, and extols a house only because it is his own. They keep many little books of piety, to distribute among the poor, or sell cheap to the rich; but will never willingly show any wrote by those of their own

house. They have no recreation, only an hour-and-a-half's work in the fields every morning, and as much usually in the afternoon. On Sundays and holidays they spend this time in their cells or in walking alone. They have five hours allowed for rest in the night; but this is interrupted for five hours from ten till three, or, on holidays, four in the morning, in choir. They have nine hours every day in choir, singing in a firm, high voice. Their beds are hard and uneven, worse than boards. From their rising till their going to bed, they hardly ever re-enter their cells; and have never any rest, going continually from exercise to exercise, and being always within sight of one another to banish sloth. This constant fatigue makes their legs swell very much. They never put on more clothes for cold, or less for heat, or change for perspiration. Many of them are subject to violent rheumatisms, so as scarcely to be able to drag themselves along. Their drink is very poor sour cider, such as is used by the very poorest persons in Normandy; or, for those monks from other countries, with whom that does not agree, very small beer. On fasting days they eat only dry herbs boiled with a little salt, with a large slice of coarse bread and half a pint of their cider. On other days, their portion is, besides an herb soup and a dessert of a raddish or two, or a few walnuts, or the like, a little plate of croudy, or kidney-beans, or lentiles, or other legumes or roots dressed with salt, or mixed with a little milk. They never eat fish on any account; never touch eggs or flesh, unless very sick, and then only the coarsest and poorest, not anything tender or dainty. Once, the bread being made a little less coarse than ordinary, the abbot John de Rancé put the whole house under penance, to atone for the fault. At night, they have nothing but three, and, on church fasting days, two ounces of dry bread. They have many disciplines, long prostrations, and practise a perpetual mortification of all their senses. Abbot de Rancé turned out a novice, as not having the spirit of the order, because he observed him in weeding to put by the nettles, for fear of being stung. When they come to the fire in winter, they must not approach very near it, but stand reading at a distance in the calefactory, and never put out a foot or pull up their clothes to warm themselves, nor stay long. The least fault is most severely proclaimed and punished. The motto written on their chapter-house wall is most literally true: "The slightest fault here passes for a crime, and is always punished according to the utmost rigour, without excuse and without pity; and the body, the innocent enemy of the soul, becomes, by holy severity, her victim."

Even in their sickness the superior treats them with harshness, to increase their crowns.

Abbot John asking one very sick how he had slept, and he answering very ill, the abbot said severely: "You are delicate, and unmortified indeed; you have slept too well." The next morning he answered to the like question of his abbot, that he had slept well: the abbot learning from the brother infirmarian that he had not closed his eyes, chid him as a liar; the monk, with great simplicity, answered, that he had slept as well as the night before, which was too well for such a sinner. Under their greatest pains, they reproach themselves as faint penitents, and add to them voluntary mortifications. In their agonies they are carried to the church, laid on ashes, and there receive the last sacraments, and remain till they expire truly happy martyrs of penance. This reform of the Cistercian order to its primitive institution was made by abbot Armand John le Bouthillier de Rancé, of an illustrious and puissant family, in France. He entered the ecclesiastical state, and was destined to succeed his uncle in the archbishopric of Tours. His learning and eloquence had made him speaker of the assemblies of the French clergy, and their oracle. He was chaplain to the Duke of Orleans, and the king had heaped on him great church pensions and livings. Being thirty years of age, he began to entertain great scruples whether his employ of his revenues in equipages, table, and great house-keeping, and that of his time in diversions and company, was according to religion and duty. He chose those directors who were the least likely to flatter him by their advice, and sold his own estate of 30,000 livres, or £1,400 sterling a-year, which he had inherited from his family. He distributed a hundred thousand crowns amongst the poor, and the rest in other pious uses; resigned three abbeys and two priories, which he possessed in commendam, but taking on himself the Cistercian habit in his abbey of our Lady of la Trappe, commenced the reformation of it nearly according to the first institution of St. Benedict and the reform of St. Bernard, anno 1664. He testifies of himself that he suffered more from the first victory over himself in rising without a fire in the cold than from all the mortifications he underwent afterwards, so much does this depend on the will and imagination. He died in the year 1700, being seventy-five years of age, of which he had spent thirty-seven in that austere solitude. How cheerful these holy penitents are under their rigours appears from the visits that have been made of that house, in which every monk is obliged to discover his real sentiments, and

in which they had offers of mitigations in their austerities. In the year 1678, the abbot of Prieres, being deputed visitor of la Trappe, declared that he found the religious, some of the most tender and delicate complexion, some above fourscore years of age, living on a water soup, made with cabbage or such herbs and salt, a portion of legumes, with only the same seasoning, brown bread, and half a pint of cider; yet all well, hearty, cheerful, and begging that their austerities might be increased. See the life of abbot John, wrote by Marsoulier, Canon of Usez, or rather that by Dom le Main, his superior.

Another time, anno 1684, when many accused this institution as too severe for nature, abbot John assembled his religious to declare their sentiments upon it. The fathers all cried out unanimously that their mortifications were too light for heaven, and to satisfy for their sins, protesting they underwent them all with joy, and were ashamed of their sloth in not doing more. When it was urged by a certain prelate that the lay-brothers, at least, ought to be allowed some indulgences, the same abbot, anno 1687, summoned them to chapter, read his letter to them, and commanded every one to declare his opinion and desires. 1. B. Male said: "I have lived twenty years in this house, and never found anything but what was easy and sweet. I have always regarded myself as wax, to receive from your hands whatsoever figure you are pleased to mould me into; but I see myself as a wild horse, if I am not held in by the bridle; if my state wants a change, it ought to be more restrained. I have always endeavoured to obey, and regard in you the person of Christ." Falling on his knees, he added, that he was as a handkerchief in his hand, which he might use in the manner he pleased. 2. B. Pacomius said, his life had been unprofitable, he wished his rigours augmented, and was ashamed to see how much worldlings undergo for vanity. 3. B. Hilarion said, his austerities ought rather to be redoubled, to subject his body to the spirit, lest he should lose his crown; that, God having called him to that state, it was to be his sanctification. 4. B. Firmin, instead of relaxations, begged on his knees that his abbot would shut him up in a close prison, as he had often done before. 5. B. Francis prayed that his austerities might be increased. The rest, every one, gave similar answers. See Abbot John's Conferences: second Sunday after Epiphany, anno 1687, T. 1, p. 287.

## DISCOURSE XXX.

### ON THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE.

1. Christ, to make penance a more easy and more powerful remedy of sin, was pleased, in his infinite mercy, to make it a sacrament of the New Law, instituting it "an exterior sensible rite, with a promise of grace, for the pardon of sin committed after baptism." For this purpose, he gave to the priests or pastors of his Church the keys of the kingdom of heaven, with the authority to bind or loose sinners, as they should present themselves before them contrite and worthy, or impenitent and indisposed. This he clearly expressed, saying to St. Peter in particular; Matt. xvi. 19: "I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth, it shall be bound also in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, it shall be loosed also in heaven;" and to all the apostles, and, in them, to all their successors, the pastors of his Church, as is evident from the context; Matt. xviii. 18: "Whatsoever you shall bind upon earth, shall be bound also in heaven; and whatsoever you shall loose upon earth, shall be loosed also in heaven." Christ, whose jurisdiction certainly reached men's interior or consciences, here gives to his Church not only the authority of excommunicating, or exteriorly cutting off from her communion, contumacious and rebellious sinners; but also an authority over their consciences, to bind or loose their penitent or impenitent souls, and consequently to open or shut to them the gates of heaven, thus investing his ministers with his jurisdiction to be exercised in his name, according to the laws prescribed by him, and constituting them his delegates and vicegerents in his tribunal in his Church. If these words imply an authority of excommunication in the Church; if in an accommodatious sense they may be remotely applied to the remote dispositions or means of obtaining pardon for sin; undoubtedly, their principal, proper, and natural meaning is, this interior jurisdiction conferred on the Church in the sacrament of penance. This the very words clearly import; this the perpetual tradition of the Church and consent of the Fathers demonstrate. Moreover, what Jesus here promised, he, after his resurrection, actually conferred on his apostles. "He breathed on them; and he said to them: Receive ye the Holy Ghost:

Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained."—John, xx. 22, 23.

The Fathers acknowledge this authority granted to the pastors of the Church. Tertullian, the most ancient writer of the Latins, proves, that heaven cannot be shut to sinners, seeing the Lord left its keys to St. Peter, and Peter left them to the Church.* See St. Cyprian, Ep. 54. ad Cornel, ed. Pam., et Ep. 52. ad Antionias. St. Jerome, in Matt. c. 16 et 18, et Ep. L. ad Heliod. St. Augustin, l. 20. de Civ. Dei, c. 9; l. 1. contra Advers. Legis, c. 18; Tract. 22. et 49. in Joan., &c.

They extol this authority of priests over men's souls in the most magnificent terms possible. St. Chrysostom writes thus (l. 3. de Sacerd. c. 5, t. 1, ed. Ben. p. 383): "They who dwell on earth are entrusted with the dispensation of the things which are in heaven, and have received a power, which God had neither given to the angels nor to the archangels: for neither was it said to them: 'Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven,' &c.—Matt. xviii. They who command on earth have a power of binding only the bodies: but this bond reaches the soul, and transcends the heavens. And whatever the priests do below, God confirms the same above, and the Lord ratifies and regards as firm the sentence of his servants. 'Whose sins,' says he, 'ye shall remit, they are remitted,' &c.—John, xx. 23. What power could be greater than this? 'The Father gave all judgment to his Son.'—John, v. 42. And I see it all given again by the Son to them. If the Emperor shall have given this honour to a subject, that he may cast into prison, or release out of it, whomsoever he shall please, he is looked upon with admiration. But he, who has received from God so much a greater power, as heaven is more precious than earth, and souls than bodies," &c. And c. 6, p. 384: "It was allowed to the priests of the Jews to cleanse the leprosy of the body; nay, rather not to cleanse, but to make trial of those that were cleansed; but these have received the power, not to try them who are cleansed, but to cleanse, not the leprosy of the body, but the uncleanness of the soul." See St. Hilary in Matt. xviii. p. 700, with the Benedictines' note.

They compare penance with baptism, and call it no less a sacrament. Tertullian calls them equally the two planks after shipwreck, l. de Pœnit. c. 12. And St. Ambrose (l. 1. de Pœnit. c. 8)

* "Memento hic Dominum claves ejus Petro, Petrum ecclesiæ reliquisse."—Tert. Scorpion. c. 10, p. 496.

refutes the Novatians denying that "the Church could forgive all sins by penance. It matters not whether priests assume to themselves the authority of remitting sins by penance, or by baptism. It is the same mystery in each.* But you say, that in baptism the grace of the mystery or sacrament works. What in penance? Does not the same name of God operate? What then? You assume the grace of God where you please, and reject it where you please." St. Austin compares penance with baptism, and expressly calls both sacraments; l. 5. de Bapt. c. 20, t. 9, p. 155. Also in Psal. cxlv. n. 8, t. 4, p. 1642. So does Theodoret, Epit. Div. Decr. c. 28, t. 4, p. 314. St. Jerome says: "Penance imitates the grace of baptism by the unspeakable clemency of our Saviour."—l. 1. contra Pelag. t. 4. And Ep. 1. ad Heliod. t. 4, par. 2, p. 10, speaking of priests, he says: "By whom we are Christians; who having the keys of the kingdom of heaven judge, as it were, before the day of judgment."

They add, that sinners cannot receive pardon but by the keys of the Church and the priest's absolution, as shall be seen below.

The Church condemned the Montanists in the second century, and the Novatians in the third, because they denied that the Church had authority, by virtue of the keys, to forgive all sins. "This wickedly," says St. Ambrose, l. de Pœnit. c. 6, "seeing it was said to Peter: To thee I will give the keys," &c. From the state of the question against these heretics it is evident, that the authority of remitting sin by the priestly absolution was an incontestable truth allowed on both sides, only that the heretics would restrain it to certain sins. Add, that all the Oriental schismatical and heretical Churches agree in the necessity of sacramental confession and absolution, as is clear from all their professions of faith;—see Allatius, Arcudius, and the certificates collected in the end of the third tome of the work entitled Perpetuité de la Foy;—though some of these Churches have been separated from the Catholic communion since the fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth centuries.

It is true, indeed, that only God forgives sins; but what he does by his vicars and delegates is his power, and his act and deed.† Nor is the priest an independent judge; he can pronounce sentence only according to the laws of his supreme judge; he can absolve

* Idem in utroque mysterium est.

† "Solus hoc, inquies, Deus poterit. Verum est; sed et quod per sacerdotes suos facit ipsius potestas est."—St. Pacian. ad Symphor. Ep. I.

only those, whom God has visited with the grace of compunction, as St. Gregory the Great says, Hom. 26. in Evang. T. 1. p. 1555.

2. In the institution of the sacrament of penance is implied a divine precept of confessing all mortal sins, committed after baptism, to a priest. Luther and Calvin call this confession advantageous and advisable, but inveigh against the obligation or precept of it. What other heretics thought of it may be seen in Bossuet's History of Variations, B. 3, and 11, and in the works of the two brothers Walemburg, Tom. II. p. 18. The Council of Trent, Sess. 14, c. 5, declares, according to the tradition of the Catholic Church, that it is of divine precept, though not commanded by Christ to be necessarily public; nor could that be prudently ordained by any human law.*

Christ gave to the pastors of his Church the power of remitting or retaining sin by the sentence, that they should pronounce in his name and authority, as has been shown; now they cannot exercise this judgment without knowing the case of the sinner by his voluntary accusation of himself. As, if a king gives a subordinate judge power to decide a cause, he, by the same warrant, cannot but give him authority to examine and know it. This the Apostles understood, and this the Church always practised from the earliest ages.

We read that, when St. Paul preached at Ephesus, Acts, xix. 18, "many of them that believed came confessing and declaring their deeds." The words, "their deeds," shows it was a particular confession of their sins, not merely a general accusation that they were sinners. Nor were these catechumens or new converts: for the original Greek word, πεπισευκοτων, by which they are designated, is in the preter-perfect tense, "some of those who believed, or were of the faithful before." It seems, from the following verse, that they had, after their conversion, been guilty still of certain superstitious practices.

St. James says, v. 16, "Confess your sins one to another;" that is, to the priests of the Church, of whom he was then speaking, and whom he had just before ordered to be called for, and brought into the sick. The words "your sins" express clearly a particular confession in detail. Origen, Hom. 2. in Lev. St. Augustin, Hom. 12. inter 50. Bede in Jac. v. Alcuin, Ep. 71. The second Council of Chalons, St. Thomas, &c., explain this of sacramental confession.

* See on this Estius in 4. dist. 17. St. Marthe, Traité sur la Confession, &c.

Also St. John, Ep. 1. 9, writes: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us, and to cleanse us from all iniquity." Which words, according to Estius and Calmet, two exact and learned critics, must necessarily be understood of this sacrament, as the apostle speaks of Christians, and says, confess our sins, not confess ourselves sinners.

To copy the clear testimonies of the Fathers would swell our reflections into a volume. Yet, as this subject is obscured by many, it is necessary to quote some short passages, which may suffice to set the tradition and practice of the Church in every age in a clear light.

St. Clemens, Bishop of Rome, and disciple of St. Peter, Ep. 2. ad Cor. 11, 1, p. 137, ed. Clerici, exhorts all to penance whilst we have time; for, after we shall have left this world we can no more confess or do penance.

In the second century, St. Irenæus, treating of Mark the heresiarch, relates, that women converted from his sect could not be admitted into the Church till they had confessed their sins and secret lusts. And B. 3, c. 4, on Cerdo's often repenting and often relapsing, he says: "He finished, sometimes teaching privately his heresy, sometimes making a confession," "*modo et exomologesin faciens*," not in public penance, which could never be repeated, but only in private confession. Tertullian, l. de Pœnit., c. 10, p. 127, inveighing against those who shun or defer confession out of shame, exclaims: "And so they perish with their shame." See also c. 9, p. 126. Origen says, Hom. 2. in Ps. 37, n. 6, t. 2, ed. Ben., p. 688: "The Scripture teaches us that it is necessary that a sin be not concealed inwardly; therefore, look about diligently to whom you ought to confess your sin. If he see your disease to be such that it ought to be exposed in the assembly of the Church, this is to be done with mature deliberation, and the counsel of a sufficiently skilful physician." Hence it is plain that there were many confessors besides the bishop and his grand penitentiary. And Hom. 2. in Levit. t. 2, p. 191, having enumerated six means by which sin is forgiven, viz., martyrdom, baptism, alms, forgiving of injuries, charity in converting brethren, and the love of God, he adds (for mortal sin after baptism), "there is a seventh, though painful and laborious remission of sin by penance, when the sinner is not ashamed to confess his sin to the priest of the Lord, and seek a remedy." And Hom. 3, ib. 11, 4, p. 196: "If we have done anything in private, if we have committed anything only in word, or in the secret of our thoughts, all must necessarily be told and published."

In the third century St. Cyprian (Tr. de Lapsis, p. 95), relates, that true penitents, who had not fallen into idolatry, "yet, because they had only thought of it, with grief and simplicity confessing this to the priests of God, making a declaration of their conscience, expose the burden of their mind. Let every one confess his sin while he is yet in the world, whilst his confession can be admitted, whilst the satisfaction and remission done through the priests is agreeable to God."

In the fourth century St. Basil says (Reg. Brev. qu. 229, t. 2, p. 288): "It is necessary to confess sins to those to whom the dispensation of the mysteries of God is committed."

St. Gregory of Nyssa, Ep. Can. ad Letoium, Can. 6, t. 2, p. 122, speaking of secret theft, a sin not subject to public penance, says: "If he discover his sin to the priest, with a heart entirely changed, he will cure his disease." And in his homilies upon penance, and against those who judge bitterly, t. 2, p. 176, or rather St. Asterius, of Amasa, in the same age, as Photius witnesses, Col. 271: "Boldly discover thy secrets to him, manifest the hidden recesses of thy heart as occult wounds to a physician. He will have a regard both to thy honour and thy health. Parents are more moved with their children's disgrace than the sons themselves."

St. Athanasius, t. 2. Collect. Patr., p. 103, by Montfaucon: "As a man baptized by a priest is enlightened by the grace of the Holy Ghost, so he, who confesses in repentance through the priest, receives, by Christ's grace, pardon."

St. Ambrose is said, by Paulinus, his deacon, in his Life, to have been accustomed to weep over penitents confessing their sins to him, so as to force them also to weep, and to have been religiously scrupulous in not mentioning anything of the crimes confessed to him, except to God alone, in his prayers for his penitents.

That holy father writes thus, l. 2. de Pœnit., c. 6, t. 4, p. 374: "If thou wouldst be justified, confess thy sin, for a bashful confession of sin looses the bonds of crime." And c. 7, p. 376: "Discover thy sin outwardly."

And in his exhortation to penance, against a delay of it, he urges: "Because he knows not if he can receive penance hereafter, and confess his sin to God and the priest." Which words St. Augustin also repeats, Serm. 393, Col. Hom. 41, t. 5, p. 1509.

St. Augustin writes thus, Conc. 2. in Ps. 101, n, 3, p. 1103,

t. 4: "When you hear a man, by confessing, bring forth his conscience, he is now brought out of the sepulchre, but he is not yet unbound. When is he unbound? by whom is he unbound? 'Whatsoever you shall loose on earth,' &c., says Christ."

And Serm. 392, col. 49, inter 50, n. 3, t. 5, p. 1504: "Let no man say to himself, I do penance privately, I do penance with God. Therefore, it was said without cause: 'Whatsoever you shall loose,' &c. Therefore, without cause were the keys given to the Church of God." And in Ps. lxvi., n. 6, t. 4, p. 600: "If you lurk unconfessed, you will be condemned upon your confession."

St. Pacian is very explicit on confession to the priest, Paræn. ad Pœnit.: "Cease to cover your wounded conscience," &c.

Sozomen, l. 7, c. 16, ed. Vales., relates, that upon the origin of the Novatian heresy, many churches, "seeing penitents were obliged necessarily to confess their sins," constituted a public penitentiary to hear them. He and Socrates, l. 5, c. 19, give us an account how a woman at Constantinople imprudently divulged a crime which she had committed, to the great scandal of the Church, says Socrates. Upon this, Nectarius, then Archbishop of Constantinople, abolished the office of public penitentiary. Calvin triumphs as if he had abolished private confession, which consequently could then only be looked upon as a Church precept; but it is evident that confession was held necessary for penitents, as Sozomen declares. Nectarius did not abolish even public penance, which subsisted in that Church afterwards, as appears from St. Chrysostom, Hom. 3. in Ephes. et 9. et 12. in Hebr.; from S. Nilus, Ep. ad Charicium; the Council in Trullo, &c. He only set aside all public confession of private sins, and the office of the public penitentiary, who was a censor to inspect the manners of the faithful, and could order public penance or public confession according to his discretion. After this, penitents confessed to whom they pleased, and, according to their own devotion and prudence, approached the sacraments. This fact, therefore, is a clear proof of the precept of confession.

St. Chrysostom says (Hom. 5. de Verb. Isa. t. 6, p. 32, ed. Ben.): "The throne of the priesthood is placed in heaven. He sits judge on earth: the Lord follows the servant, and confirms in heaven whatever he judges on earth." And Hom. 30. in Gen. p. 301, t. 4: "The devil labours much to hinder us from confessing our sins, and discovering our wounds to the physician, and reco-

vering health." Hom. 20. in Gen. p. 175, he writes: "If he will hasten to the confession of his sins, and discover his ulcer to the physician, who will heal and not reproach him; and speak to him alone, no one else being conscious, and carefully declaring all things, he will easily amend himself. For the confession of sins is their abolition." And Hom. 3. ad. Pop. Ant., t. 2, p. 42: "Manifest thy sore to the priest." He teaches, at full length, that the priests are the physicians of our souls, l. 2. de Sacerd., c. 4, t. 1, p. 374. As do St. Jerome in c. 10. Eccl.; St. Ambrose in Off. 37; St. Greg. Nyss. Ep. Can.; Origen, Hom. 2. in Ps. 37.

St. John Climacus, Gr. 4, n. 11, says: "Without which confession, no one shall obtain pardon."

And John of Raithe, his contemporary, in his Annotations, Ib.: "We are bound, by the necessity of the divine precept, to confess our sins, as is manifest from the apostolical traditions."

Bede relates, Hist. l. 5, c. 14, that King Coenred exhorted a sick nobleman, of a wicked life, to confess, and relinquish his vices; but he answered, that he would not now confess his sins, but when he should be restored to his health. And l. 4, c. 27, that such was the angelical countenance of St. Cuthbert, that no one durst in confession conceal any secrets of his heart from him.

Pope Innocent the First, Ep. Decretal. ad Decent., c. 7, t. 2, p. 1247, says: "It is the part of the priest, in weighing the malice of sins to judge of them, that he attend to the penitent's confession."

We have the ancient forms of confession, with interrogations, examples, &c., in the oldest ritual books, as of St. Gregory the Great, in his Sacramentary, p. 213; of St. Fulgentius and others, in Menard in his Notes, p. 450. Others in Martene De Antiquis Rit., Par. 2, c. 6, p. 450. That of John the Faster, Patriarch of Constantinople, in Morinus, Append., pp. 76, 94.

Particular examples of private confession, besides those of public penance, we have in St. Irenæus, in St. Ambrose, Socrates, &c.

S. Ansbert, Archbishop of Rouen, was the confessor of Theodoric, King of France. Mabillon, sec. 2. Ben. p. 155. As was St. Wiro, an Irish bishop, of Pepin the Great, mayor of the King of France's palace, and founder of the greatest race of its kings, who was accustomed to go to him to confession, barefoot, and to obey his words. Bolland, 8 Maii.

Our adversaries object, that there is no mention of confession generally required before communion; but nothing is clearer from

all antiquity than that it was always of precept for all persons guilty of mortal sin. Hence St. Cyprian inveighs thus against sacrilegious communions, Tr. de Lapsis: "Contemning the sentence of the Apostle, 'Whosoever shall eat and drink unworthily,' &c., they came to the Eucharist before sins are expiated, before the confession of the crime is made, before the conscience is purified by sacrifice and the imposition of the hand of the priest, and so they offered violence to his body and blood." And St. Ambrose, l. 6. in Lucam, c. 9: "No one receives the food of Christ, unless healed. Let the order of the mystery be everywhere observed, that a remedy be first applied to the wounds; and after that he be fed with the heavenly banquet." So speaks also St. Pacian, &c.

If Eusebius, St. Chrysostom, and others, say that we are to confess to God alone, they often speak of a confession of praise, as Eusebius in Ps. 191 (see Montfaucon, Prælim. c. 7, p. 31, Ceillier, t. 4, p. 410); or of catechumens, or of the evening examen of daily venial sins, or of sacramental confession, which is often said also by moderns to be made to God alone, because only to his vicegerent, presiding in his name, as Godfrey of Vendome says, Ep. 16, which is the same as when St. Anastasius the Sinaite, Hom. de Sacra Syn. says, "Confess thy sins to Christ, through the priest;" and St. Austin, Serm. 393, and St. Leo, Ep. 136, "to God and the priest."

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## DISCOURSE XXXI.

### ON THE ADVANTAGES OF THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE.

1. To make this sovereign remedy of penance more sure, more powerful, and more easy, our divine Redeemer, the true lover of lost souls, was pleased, in his infinite mercy and compassion for sinners, to raise it to the most excellent dignity of a sacrament of the new law of grace, and make it the noble instrument for imparting the fruit of his most sacred blood, and the merits of his sufferings and death, to the most miserable of souls. For this end, he constituted the priests, whom he ordained the dispensers of his mysteries on earth, his vicars and delegated judges of sinners, committing to them the keys of the kingdom of heaven, by the use of which authority, according to the holy laws he has

prescribed to them, they reconcile truly penitent sinners, who had relapsed after baptism, to his divine favour and grace by the sentence of absolution, which they pronounce over them in his name, and following the terms of his merciful commission. So that they sit in his tribunal on earth, and it is his judgment which they exercise. He is the great invisible High Priest, who absolves the penitent, and clothes him with his precious and most holy grace interiorly, whilst the priest exercises his exterior ministry. To his priests, therefore, he has given a far greater authority than he ever bestowed on any angels or archangels; and God ratifies above, and follows himself the sentence of his servants, as St. Chrysostom, l. 3. de Sacerd., c. 5, and St. Gregory the Great, de Cur. Past., say: "They judge and pronounce his sentence, as it were, before the day of judgment." St. Jerome, Ep. 1. ad Heliodor., p. 107. And St. Hilary in Matt. xvii. p. 700, ed. Ben.: "To strike all with the greatest awe, he laid down the immovable judgment of the sentence of the apostles (and their successors), that, whosoever they should bind on earth, that is, leave bound by the chains of their sins; and whosoever they should loose, viz., upon their confession, receive to the pardon of salvation, these, by the condition of the apostolic sentence, should be either bound or loosed also in heaven."

2. It may be alleged, that the sole virtue of penance, without any confession or sacrament, remitted sin in the Old Law, and has the same effect still, if joined with a desire of the sacrament, when it cannot be actually received. What, then, is the prerogative and benefit of this sacrament so much extolled? Its advantages are that it furnishes us a means of remission more powerful, as it more nobly applies to the soul the price of our redemption and propitiation; more sure, as it pardons sin by a visible sign and exterior sentence; lastly, more easy and ordinary. The contrition, which was of itself necessary to obtain pardon, was necessarily to be a great, intense, and quite extraordinary sorrow and grace, very rarely found in penitents just rising from the state of sin; and "because few arrived at that degree, pardon of sins could be hoped for only by very few that way," says the Roman or Trent Catechism. But what was so rare and extraordinary a mercy is, by this wonderful sacrament, made frequent and easy. It is true, the sacrament essentially requires contrition or the virtue of penance, as a constituent part; but this in a more ordinary degree; and its preparation, by its acts and special graces, helps to stir that up.

Hence, the Church has always looked upon the benefit of this sacrament as a great mercy, and bewailed the death of penitents deprived of it, as a dangerous misfortune, though not absolutely to be despaired of. St. Augustin cries out with tears for such: "If ministers of the sacraments are wanting, how great a destruction follows them, who depart out of this world, either not regenerated by baptism, or unbound by absolution!"—Ep. 228, al. 180. This saint himself had wept bitterly in perfect repentance, yet presumed not on the grace of pardon received, but with baptism; Conf. l. 4, c. ult. et l. 9, c. 4. St. Paul, Acts, xxii. 16, and Cornelius, Acts, x. 2, wanted baptism, though they had perfect contrition. And St. Augustin says: "How much soever a catechumen is advanced in virtue (by the ordinary course of grace) he still carries the burthen of his iniquity: it is not forgiven him except when he comes to baptism."—Tr. 13. in Joan., n. 6, t. 3, p. 394. It is the same equally of the sacrament of penance, according to the same holy doctor; wherefore the Catholics in Africa, seeing their bishops and priests carried into exile, in the Vandalic persecution, thus bemoaned their own abandoned condition, destitute of the sacraments: "Who will baptize our little ones? Who will bestow on us the benefit of penance, and loosen those bound with sins, by the indulgence of reconciliation? because to you it was said: 'Whatsoever you shall loose,' &c." as Victor of Utica relates, de Pers. Vandal., l. 2, p. 656. Bibl. Patr., t. 5, par. 3.

On this account the Church forbids absolution to be ever denied to any sinner at the article of death; which was even an order of the first General Council of Nice, Can. 13, whatever may have been the severity of some private churches. See Lupus, Schol. ib.

The canon law declares, cap. Presbyter, causa 26, that a priest refusing absolution to a dying man may be the cause of his damnation; and Pope Celestine, Ep. 2, t. 2, Conc. p. 1619, related in cap. Agnovimus, causa 27, de Pœn., states, that this is to add a spiritual death to his corporal death, and to deprive him of salvation; adding, "we tremble with horror that any one should be found so impious and cruel," &c. The Church, therefore, allows no reservation of cases in the article of death, but gives jurisdiction to all priests without the least restriction on that occasion, that no one, if possible, may die without the benefit of absolution. Conc. Trid. Sess. xiv. cap. 7. This sacrament then affords us a more easy and a more abundant grace of pardon, and an extraordinary mercy.

3. The better to understand this unspeakable benefit, we must reflect, that to have been once delivered from the sentence of eternal damnation was an infinite mercy; a grace which could have been noways thought of by any creature, had not God's boundless clemency planned the wonderful design, and carried it into execution, by a mystery which will fill all creatures with astonishment to all eternity. Pardon was never offered to the devils for a single offence; much less so admirable a redemption as ours, by the incarnation of the Son of God at the infinite price of his adorable blood. But we were made partakers of this wonderful ransom by baptism; all our guilt was blotted out by it, and we were reinstated in grace and in all those glorious titles, which we had most justly forfeited: nay, our condition was rendered happier by this superabundant propitiation, and a promise and offer of greater crowns made than if we had never been guilty of any rebellion against God. Who would have thought it possible, that we could be so insensible and ungrateful as, after this mercy, again to relapse into sin, and make void so plentiful, so astonishing a redemption! And in case of such a baseness, what further mercy could be hoped for? How justly should we deserve to be sentenced a thousand times over to the worst of hells! "There is now left no sacrifice for sins."—Heb. x. 26. Alas! my soul, I have been capable of, and have actually fallen into this so inconceivable and monstrous guilt; yet the still more inconceivable mercy of God has provided me with a second remedy. The ransom paid for my sin by Christ, being infinite and inexhaustible, was graciously offered by him to be applied to my soul, whensoever, oh! stupendous mercy, even after the basest relapses, I should again sincerely have recourse to it. Penance is the great instrument of this stupendous grace, principally and most nobly, as it is a sacrament of the New Law. My soul, admire the infinite mercy of God in having instituted it; praise his goodness in it in raptures of love and gratitude at the consideration of it; and resolve never to cease returning thy poor thanks for it. Ah! without it, where had I myself been? irretrievably lost, perhaps many times over.

4. Christ in this sacrament has given to his Church an unbounded authority to forgive all sins, upon the condition of sincere repentance. The heresiarch Montanus advanced that the Church ought not to remit the more grievous sins, as idolatry, murder, fraud, fornication, and the like, lest such indulgence should be an encouragement to Christians sometimes to commit them. See Tertullian, l. de Pudic., c. 21. Novatus of Carthage and Novatian

of Rome, two schismatical priests, added this heresy to their separation from their pastors, that the Church could not pardon apostacy from the faith to idolatry, and certain other heinous crimes. These errors were immediately condemned by the Church, and confuted at large by the Fathers of the second, third, and fourth centuries. For Christ's unbounded mercy gave to his Church an unlimited power to remit all sins whatsoever, and to whomsoever, upon their true repentance, as the express terms of his commission import, and the Church has always maintained and practised. Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, being a direct resisting of the calls of grace, and the means of conversion, is called unpardonable, because most difficult to be forgiven, as repentance for it is difficult and very rare; yet it is pardonable by the keys of the Church, unless actually closed by final impenitence, to which it usually leads souls. No one, then, who seeks sincerely the remedy of his soul, is to be excluded from the benefit of this universal and all-powerful sacrament; for Christ would have no restriction or exception in his mercies, of which he established this the instrument. "He excepted no crime, who opened a pardon to all," says St. Ambrose, l. 1. de Pœnit., c. 2. And St. Jerome, Ep. ad Oceanum, t. 4, p. 646: "Christ died in vain, if there are any whom he cannot revive. John the Baptist is not to be believed, who, showing Christ, said: 'Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world;' if there are yet any in the world, whose sins he has not taken away." O sweet and amiable mercy! O goodness most comfortable to sinners! How is God to be ever admired in it, loved and praised by all creatures to eternity!

5. This sacrament is, by the divine law, promulgated in its institution, absolutely necessary for the remission of all mortal sins committed after baptism. How could the Church bind sinners, if they are not obliged to undergo its sentence, and to present themselves before its tribunal? A coercive jurisdiction, which is entirely precarious, and which delinquents are not obliged to submit to, must be null and of no force. For a sinner to say, that he does penance privately and before God alone, without recourse to the judgment of the Church, is to destroy the words of Christ to his Church, and to annul the power of its keys; it is to make void God's Gospel; to make void the words of Christ, as St. Augustine justly observes (Serm. 292. Hom. 49. inter 50, n. 3, t. 5, p. 1504), and as the Church has always both inculcated and practised.

Therefore by the divine precept of Christ, when he instituted this holy sacrament, and gave this law, all, who by baptism have subjected themselves to the Church, and have afterwards violated the laws of the Gospel, are bound to submit themselves to, and to undergo the judgment of this same holy Church in the interior tribunal of penance, in which it exercises the power given to it by Christ, of remitting and retaining sins.

Hence, there is a great difference between the remission of sin committed before, and of that committed after baptism. "Sin committed before baptism is washed away by baptism; if committed after baptism, it is healed by penance and reconciliation;" says St. Augustine, l. 2. de Adult. Conjug., c. 16, t. 6, p. 414. This, then, is the only bath that remains to cleanse my offences after baptism. How diligently must I use it!

6. Perfect contrition, from a motive of fervent, intense charity, does, as in the Old Law, so still justify immediately. God's promises for this grace are clear, and regard all times and dispensations of his law. Ezech. xxxiii. 12; Luke, x. 12. Whence, St. Chrysostom says, Hom. v. in 2 Tim. t. 12, p. 703: "As fire, entering a wood, clears and removes all before it, so the fervour of love, wheresoever it falls, cuts up and takes away all that demolishes the divine seed of grace. Where charity is, all evils are removed; for all sins are loosed and cleared by the presence of charity."

But this perfect degree of contrition is known only to God, and is always uncertain to us without a revelation. And we know it to be a very extraordinary grace in sinners just arising from their crimes. Miracles of such conversions are very rare. "I do not say, says the Lord, but I may save some such; for I am able in a moment to restore all: but I shall not assemble great conventicles of such;" as St. Bernard writes, Serm. 75. de Di.: and as the Trent Catechism says, n. 37, "Few come to this degree."

And even when perfect contrition does justify before the sacrament be actually received, or when it cannot be received for want of a priest, it implies a resolution of satisfying this precept by confessing, if possible, and submitting to the tribunal of the Church. This purpose ought to be explicit in all, who are not in an inculpable ignorance of the divine precept of confession: in others it must be an implicit one, viz.: of doing all, in general, that God requires for pardon. For justification received before does not exempt from the law of subjecting the sin to the tribunal of the Church; nay, that grace is conferred only upon

the condition, and in virtue of such a purpose. The Council of Trent expressly teaches, Sess. 1, c. 4, that though this contrition is sometimes perfected by charity, and reconciles to God before the sacrament be actually received, "nevertheless this reconciliation is not to be ascribed to that contrition, without the desire and purpose of the sacrament which is included in it."

7. This is the constant tradition of the Catholic Church. Hence, the Fathers called this sacrament the only plank remaining after shipwreck. Thus, St. Jerome, Ep. ad Demetriad., 99, Ol. 65, p. 720, t. 4, par. 2, calls it "that second plank, as it were, to the miserable after shipwreck." And St. Pacian reproaches the Novatians, who denied that the Church could remit all sins, as guilty of the utmost cruelty, and says (Ep. 1. ad Symphor.), "Who could take away the plank from one perishing?" St. Ambrose says (l. 1. de Pœnit., c. 16, t. 2, p. 414): "If any one, having secret crimes, yet does penance diligently for Christ, how does he receive pardon, if the reconciliation of the Church be not granted him?" And St. Leo says (Ep. 82, al. 91, ad Theodor. t. 1, p. 605): "The manifold mercy of God has so provided for men's falls, that the hope of eternal life is repaired not only by baptism, but also by the medicine of penance; the help of the divine goodness being so ordained, that God's mercy cannot be obtained but by the supplications of the priests."

Hence, I may apply to myself the words of Tertullian, l. de Pœn., c. 4, p. 122: "Penance is life. You, O sinner! like to me, nay less than me (for I acknowledge my surpassing guilt), so seize on, so embrace it, as one shipwrecked does some plank. This will raise you up, drowned in the floods in the sin, and will bring you into the haven of the divine clemency. Suddenly lay hold on the opportunity of the unexpected safety."

8. Venial sins are not necessarily to be confessed, or subjected to the tribunal of this sacrament, as they do not shut eternally the gates of heaven; consequently they cannot be retained or bound. There are also many other means, by which a soul in the state of grace may obtain pardon of them. For this, indeed, it is necessary that she repent of them, at least virtually, if they do not occur. Secondly, that she be in God's favour by sanctifying grace, as God's friendship and familiarity must be pre-supposed, for his close familiarity to be recovered. Charity must be in a soul, or an increase of its fervour cannot be obtained; and one, who wilfully perseveres an enemy of God, can never, in that state, make any satisfaction to God, or receive the pardon of any

offence. Venial sins of frailty seem to be usually blotted out by interior contrition; but not venial sins of malice or of direct knowledge and deliberation, which require other more powerful remedies.

9. Though venial sin does not absolutely stand in need of the sacraments to be blotted out, yet it is no other way so easily and so powerfully washed away as by the sacraments, especially by baptism, the blessed Eucharist, and extreme unction; and, above all, by the sacrament of penance. Christ's commission to his Church expresses all sin whatsoever. Its absolution, therefore, has a power of remitting all sin, that is subjected to it with true repentance. And this sacrament is the universal medicine for all the wounds of the soul. The least sin is a debt too great for all the endeavours of creatures ever to be able to pay, except by the application of the blood of Christ, without which there is no remission. It alone can wash any of our stains. Only the Lamb, that was slain and is risen again, can efface sin out of the book, in which it is written, or even bear the sight of that book. All the whiteness of the robes of the saints comes from being whitened in his blood. Apoc. vii. 15. Prayer, patience, pardon of injuries, and other good works, with repentance, in the just, will apply the blood of Christ for the remission of venial sin: but the sacrament of penance is its proper vessel and most powerful instrument for this effect. Also, the more slothful Christians are now-a-days in the practice of other means, and the severer works of penance, the more fervent and diligent ought they to be in the use of this; viz., of confessing their venial sins. The confession of venial sins not only obtains absolution, but also incredible strength against them, a singular light to discover them, and plentiful graces to repair the losses and damages caused by them; and exercises in one act humility, obedience, charity, and other virtues, as St. Francis of Sales observes, Introd. Part 12, c. 2. The spirit and practice of the saints and of the Church, a rule that can never err in morals, as it is the spirit of Christ himself, authorize this frequent confession of venial sins. This is the argument made use of by the Council of Trent.—Sess. 14, c. 4. St. John exhorts to the frequent confession of venial sins, or such as the most just fall into, and which no one can say he is without; 1 John, i. 8; for he attributes the pardon of them only to the blood of Christ. "The blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse from all sin," v. 7. And for this he advises to confess them, v. 9. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just," *i. e.*, he is faithful to his promises to his Church to remit them. St. James also, v. 16, exhorting to fre-

quent confession, speaks evidently of small faults, such as are daily in the just. This practice in the Church is clear from the life of St. Theodore the Studite, the Penitential, &c.

But though this be a most wholesome and advantageous counsel, nay, in many, necessary to make them watchful against the multiplication of such falls, yet a too solicitous, prolix, and tedious confession of venial sins is to be avoided, because it exhausts the soul superfluously, consumes too much time, and hinders the heart from its best employ, the exercise of its affections, as Gerson observes.

10. Although, if a sin has been once subjected to the keys of the Church in a valid confession, followed by a legal sacramental absolution, there can be no further obligation of ever confessing it again, yet such a practice is often good and advantageous. For, though it be remitted, it is still a sin committed after baptism, consequently a sufficient matter of this sacrament; for it is still an object of an act of the virtue of penance. We are also to pray for a fuller and more perfect pardon of it. "Be not without fear for sin forgiven."—Eccl. v. 5. The priest at mass daily prays for pardon of all his innumerable past sins; so ought all who assist at that sacrifice of propitiation. David always continued to pray for the pardon of the sins of his youth. Ps. xxiv. 7. Job always feared them. Job, xiii. 26. Again David testifies, that God assured him his sins were remitted, Ps. xxxi. 5, 6; yet he still prays for a fuller pardon, and to be cleansed whiter than snow, and washed more and more. Ps. l. 4, 9. There are degrees in justification; one drop of Christ's blood can wash away all the sins in the world; but the application of it is only as Christ has instituted, and depends on the conditions on our side. We must be justified more and more till death. Naaman's leprosy was washed seven times in the Jordan, before it was perfectly cleansed, so that his skin was made as white as that of a child. 4 Kings, v. 4.

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## DISCOURSE XXXII.

### ON FREQUENT CONFESSION.

1. A soul, which has the misfortune to lie under the guilt of mortal sin, is bound immediately to enter into a spirit of penance, and not long to defer suing for a reconciliation, by confession to a priest, when opportunity allows it. For a delay exposes her to

new sins and other fatal consequences, even to the great danger of final impenitence, either by sudden death; "for he, who has promised pardon to the penitent, has never promised a to-morrow to the dissembler," says St. Prosper, Sent. 71, from St. Augustin in Ps. 144, t. 10, App. p. 228; or by wearying out God's patience, and provoking him justly to abandon her. "Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and patience, and long suffering? Knowest thou not, that the goodness of God leadeth thee to penance? But according to thy hardness and impenitent heart thou treasurest up to thyself wrath against the day of wrath."—Rom. ii. 4, 5. Such a soul hangs as a heavy load or burthen, as it were, on the mercy of God, and by her abuses of his long forbearance and merciful calls, becoming insupportable to it, is cast off.*

2. Her delay is an abuse and an interpretative contempt of the holy sacrament of penance. If some king had prepared a rich storehouse of all sorts of provisions and drugs, with able physicians and surgeons to attend gratis, in favour of his poor subjects; yet, through some obstinate distaste or sloth, no one would make use of it; would he not be justly incensed at seeing his labour, expense, care, and affection so ill requited? And can God Almighty behold his love so much slighted, a mercy which cost him so dear, and which he offers with the kindest invitations, so much contemned, without being justly provoked? He exhorts sinners, he cries out to them by his ministers, he calls them by himself: "Come unto me, all you that labour and are burthened, and I will refresh you." Though you have sinned, I desire not the death of a sinner, but that he be converted and live. You are the work of my own hands, framed to my image. Even if a mother could forget the child of her womb, I shall never forget you. I bear you engraven on my hands, bored for love of you. For you I died a bleeding victim on a cross; and I prepared by my blood this sacrament, as an easy and sovereign balsam to heal all your wounds, and to restore and increase your spiritual health and strength. Why, then, will you die, O house of Israel? If you think me harsh, or my merciful remedy hard or bitter, come make the trial, and then accuse me if you can. Isa. i. 18. You will find it to be all mildness, sweetness, and comfort.

3. Ah, sinner! can this sacrament seem a hard condition of pardon? Had God offered you mercy on the severest terms ima-

* "Noli esse amplius oneri misericordiæ Dei."—Tertullian, l. de Pœnit.

ginable, all would have been light for so great a happiness. Ah! what would a damned soul give for such an offer on any condition whatever? With what earnestness and joy would she embrace the means, and think even the severest possible to be as nothing? Think seriously what the slavery of sin and what hell are! Think what the joys of heaven and the advantages of grace, and nothing will seem severe or difficult that can rescue you from such evils, and restore such treasures and advantages. But what is the condition which God requires? Only that you repent, and confess your guilt. Could he insist upon anything more easy? Could he demand less? Certainly, the very sight of so inconceivable a mercy ought to pierce you through and through to the very marrow with grief for having offended such infinite goodness, and make you run to embrace with the greatest fervour the means of a reconciliation offered. What St. Gregory Nazianzen says of baptism equally suits penance: "Fear not the length of the way, nor the wide spaces of seas, nor fire, nor any other impediment to obtain this grace. But, seeing it neither requires labour, pains, nor journey, what folly is it to defer till another time so great a good? You who thirst, hasten to the waters; you who want money, go and buy, and drink this wine, without giving any price for it. O wonderful readiness and quickness of beneficence! O easy method of contracting! This good is offered to be purchased by the sole price of the will. God is pleased to look upon your desire of it as a sufficient price. He thirsts to be thirsted; he offers wine to those who desire to drink; he esteems it a favour to be asked a mercy. His nature is munificent and ready; he gives with a greater desire than others can receive."—Or. in Sanct. Bapt., p. 446.

And St. Chrysostom writes thus, Hom. 44. in Genesin, t. 4, p. 453: "God, inviting to penance, says, 'Am not I he who am crying to the prophets, and repeating: After all, be converted again to me, and she is not converted?'—Jer. iii. 7. Do not I do all things to free them from destruction? If they return, do I defer one moment to receive them? Do not I say, 'Even whilst thou art yet speaking, behold I am with thee?'—Isa. lxv. 24. Are they so desirous of their own salvation as I am? Did I create you out of nothing that you should perish? Did I prepare in vain my eternal kingdom and its innumerable goods for you? Did not I threaten hell only for this? Neither do I stop or defer when I see a soul converted, for I only require one thing, that he confess his sins, and abstain from them. Is my condition bur-

densome? Did I not know that men grow worse if they do not confess, I would not even exact that." And Hom. 27. in Gen. p. 264: "The Ninevites obtained pardon in three days. The good thief wanted not one short hour. God defers not, if he has the soul converted. He will also hear us if we will be diligent these few days of Lent, fast, appease God by earnest prayer, weep, confess carefully our sins, lay open our wounds to our physician, and discover the ulcers of our souls, nor reject the medicine he gives, bringing the other conditions, contrition and true compunction of heart, plentiful alms," &c.

4. This holy sacrament, frequented with truly fervent dispositions, is the most powerful means to cleanse our souls by the most abundant application of the blood of Christ, both because the humiliation of confession, the more diligent examen, and the more fervent prayer and contrition, all parts contained in it, and still more because the grace of the sacrament most powerfully contribute to this effect. The stains of our whole life past are to be continually wiping off more and more perfectly by prayer, compunction, alms, and the repeated use of this sovereign bath. We also add daily new sins, and a great branch of the duty of every Christian is speedily to cleanse them by these same antidotes. "Our ancient fathers frequently admonished," says St. Dorotheus, Doctr. 3, "that a monk ought never to suffer his conscience to be pricked with the least thing." To preserve our souls in the most perfect purity possible, we must be extremely watchful in discovering all our frailties, and very fervent in washing them away by speedy acts of interior compunction, and the practice of exterior works of penance. We ought, then, especially as Christians now-a-days are usually more slothful in the fervent use of the other means of satisfaction, and in the continual watchfulness over their hearts, to have, in the first place, frequent recourse to the sacrament of penance, as often as our circumstances will afford us an opportunity of doing it with fervour and devotion, and with due preparation and dispositions. The oftener linen is washed, the cleaner it is kept; so are our souls, the oftener they are well scoured; but there is this great difference in the comparison, that, where such linen will be worn by washing, our souls, on the contrary, are made new and strong.

St. Peter of Luxembourg, a prelate who, from his infancy, was of the most innocent life, was accustomed for many years to go to confession several times a day. We read the same of some other

saints, who would confess after any glance of mere curiosity at a bird, or at the heavens, or other such action against the rules of that strict mortification which they had prescribed to themselves. So very frequent a practice of confession is noways to be advised nor allowed in tepid Christians, who do not strenuously labour to withdraw their hearts from all earthly things, and who will not, at least so frequently, have the sincere dispositions of penance for the most ordinary failings, which they will not even discover in the motions of their hearts. A devout receiving of this sacrament must go before those actions which require a more particular purity of soul. As St. Charles Borromeo said mass every day, he went every day to confession with extraordinary compunction for the smallest frailties, in which he was imitated by Cardinal Berulle and others. St. Ignatius of Loyola once sought a confessor, finding none at home, to accuse himself, that he had discovered a subject's fault to three superiors, when one might have redressed it.

5. Penance is an universal remedy for all the spiritual wounds and diseases of our souls. If they labour under any, it is owing to a neglect or abuse of this antidote; hence such great disorders in the manners of so many Christians. "The wound, and bruise, and swelling are not bound up, nor cured with a medicine, nor cherished with oil."—Isa. i. "Full of wounds, full of pains, full of sickness, no one approaches. Is there no healing resin in Galaad, or is there not a physician? Why, therefore, is not the scar of the daughter of my people covered and skinned over?"—Jer. viii. These loving complaints of God are much more applicable to the neglect of the balsam of penance in the New Law than in the Old. This made Christ cry out, with a feeling of sense of such an insensibility and ingratitude, that by it his passion, and the great medicines he had composed of his own precious blood, were made fruitless in many. "I have laboured in vain," says this true lover of sinners, and the Redeemer of their souls, for which he had done and suffered so much; "it is without fruit and without cause that I have spent my strength."—Isa. xlix.

6. A frequent use of the sacrament of penance is the greatest preservative against sin, and this many ways. The ingredients or parts of which it is composed, on the penitent's side, are of themselves the most noble acts of the virtue of penance, and the most powerful strengtheners of the soul; viz., a most diligent

examen, the most careful contrition, and firm resolution against even all dangers and occasions of sin, and the repentant confession of sin. Each of these acts is, even singly, of great virtue and efficacy against the contagion of evil. How much more so all joined together? And, whereas at other times they are generally formed with less care and fervour, in the preparation for the sacrament the utmost diligence is used to make them in the most perfect manner. To them we must add the great advantages of the exhortations, instructions, and advice of a skilful master and director in the spiritual warfare, under a special promise of the extraordinary benediction of God, who has ordained the priests as physicians of our souls.

7. As it is a sacrament, it is a proper means of the grace of strength. Where are we to seek this grace but in its source, and by the channels through which Almighty God has been pleased to ordain it should flow for our use? It belongs to him, who is the author and giver of this treasure, to choose the method of its conveyance, and to prescribe the conditions on which he is pleased to bestow it; which he has done in the institution of this holy sacrament. This is its overflowing fountain from which we are frequently to fill our weak and sickly souls. "Here you shall draw water with joy from the fountains of your Saviour."—Isa. xii. 3.

But we must not imagine that the only effect of this sacrament is barely to heal our wounds; its advantages would in this case have been imperfect; for it would be little profit to rise from sin so as immediately to fall again, which would be even worse than not to rise at all. But the works and mercies of Christ exist not by halves. In this sacrament he dispenses grace both to heal and raise up our souls, and also to preserve and support them. If, then, we are weak, if we live amidst dangers, and in an air in which our spiritual forces are continually decaying, unless we are careful always to repair and renew them, and this even faster than they are impaired, we ought to recruit them by all the means put into our hands, and especially by the frequent diligent use of this source of the grace of spiritual strength. Our crafty enemy very well understands how formidable we are made to him by it; he is therefore most industrious to withdraw us from it, labouring to inspire an aversion and disgust of it, and to exaggerate pretended difficulties in its application.

8. Experience shows that vice makes very quick progress in a soul which neglects frequent confession out of sloth or a vain fear of it. This barrier being once removed, the passions rush head-

long, in a manner, without constraint or bridle to hold them in. The Protestants, soon after their new communion was set up found a general neglect of daily prayer, and an almost universal depravation of manners visible amongst them, as Luther and Calvin themselves complain in their writings. And Doctor Bristow observes, that it was not only the observation of Erasmus, but the common remark also of every one in England, that, as men joined them, they became more loose in their morals. Motiv. 47. Hence the virtuous were strangely disturbed and afflicted to see ignorance, sloth in virtue, and even barefaced immorality reign in so horrible a manner. Diar. Col. Angl. Duac., t. 2, p. 19. Indeed, they had abolished fasting, states of perfection, and perpetual continency, and other means of curbing the passions; but they themselves owned that the principal source of the disorders prevalent amongst them was the want of confession. This the French Calvinists solemnly acknowledged, when several of their cities petitioned their leaders that it might be restored, at least by a human law, for the public benefit, alleging that, since it had been set aside, probity, trust, restitution of injustices, &c., were very rare amongst them, and scarcely to be found. See Ste. Marthe and Bourdaloue, 13 Sund. after Pent. The Lutherans in Germany confessed the same. Dominic Soto being then confessor to the Emperor Charles V., and in Germany, writes thus of them, in 4 Dist. 18. Qu. 1. Art. 1: "They declared this publicly in my presence. Upon this account the illustrious city of Nuremberg went so far as to send an embassy to the Emperor, requesting that auricular confession might be established amongst them by an imperial law; saying, they had learned by experience, that, since it had been laid aside amongst them, their commonwealth abounded with sins against justice, and other vices before unknown. The petition only moved the court to laughter, as if an imperial law could compel men to a confession of the secrets of their consciences." It is observed by a Protestant author, that the Mahometans of Algiers love best Catholic slaves, and are very careful that they go often to confession, persuaded that this makes them faithful, honest, obedient, and virtuous.

9. An author of great learning and uncommon experience in the conduct of souls gives us these remarks and advice upon this head.* If you do not frequent ordinary confession, it is absolutely impossible to keep yourself long in the path of virtue, or to

* Gobinet's Instruct. of Youth, t. 1.

disengage yourself from vice and the way of perdition. This is an undoubted truth, which experience makes manifest. First, without frequent confession, venial sin will be multiplied, and lead to mortal, and "there was no hand to root out." Secondly, you will be secretly engaged in wicked courses and habits. If children are not taught to practise it when young, we generally afterwards bewail their misfortune, when they are found to have been early entangled in bad habits through the want of it. Thirdly, it is impossible you should live long without meeting temptations; I maintain, says this pious author, that it is impossible you should long resist them without the frequent use of this means, and I appeal to experience for proof. If you neglect this great and easy means, you will never make use of others harder, which might supply the defect of this, now that example makes them so very uncommon. Fourthly, this is the remedy and help given by God against sin, as a sacrament instituted to give that grace. It also causes a true detestation of sin and resolutions of amendment to be renewed. The admonitions of a confessor awaken you, and encourage you to shun sin, and be faithful in your good purposes. Nor are they like the general instructions of sermons, but particularly adapted to your exigencies, and received at a time when you are best disposed and prepared to listen to and profit most by them. By him you will be helped to learn the means of resisting temptations, and shunning dangerous occasions. Nay, the very discovering of temptations is in itself an effectual remedy to overcome them. The devil fears nothing so much as their being laid open.

Confess yourself once a week, fortnight, or at least a month, as advised. Confess oftener, when assaulted by more frequent temptations. It is a fault of many not to confess sooner, unless they have yielded. "Apply the remedy before the disease."—Eccl. xv. If you have fallen, confess speedily. Always confess to your ordinary confessor, if you can. If he be absent, go to another rather than miss. Be faithful in all these rules. The devil will use all endeavours to make you break them, suggesting that it is at present too great a trouble, that you are indisposed, not prepared, or a thousand other obstacles. But never let anything, except absolute impossibility, make you defer confession longer than usual, or than the circumstances mentioned require. All the faithful are bound by the Church precept, under the threat of excommunication (Conc. Lat. 4, omnis utriusque sexus, Conc.

t. 11, p. 72,) if they are arrived at the age of discretion, to confess their sins to their pastor at least once a year. The Council of Trent recommends confession more diligently in Lent, Sess. 14, cap. 5. If any one has deferred this beyond a year, he is bound to satisfy immediately, and every new delay is a new sin. Children are obliged by this precept, as they are capable of sinning, commonly when about seven years of age.

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